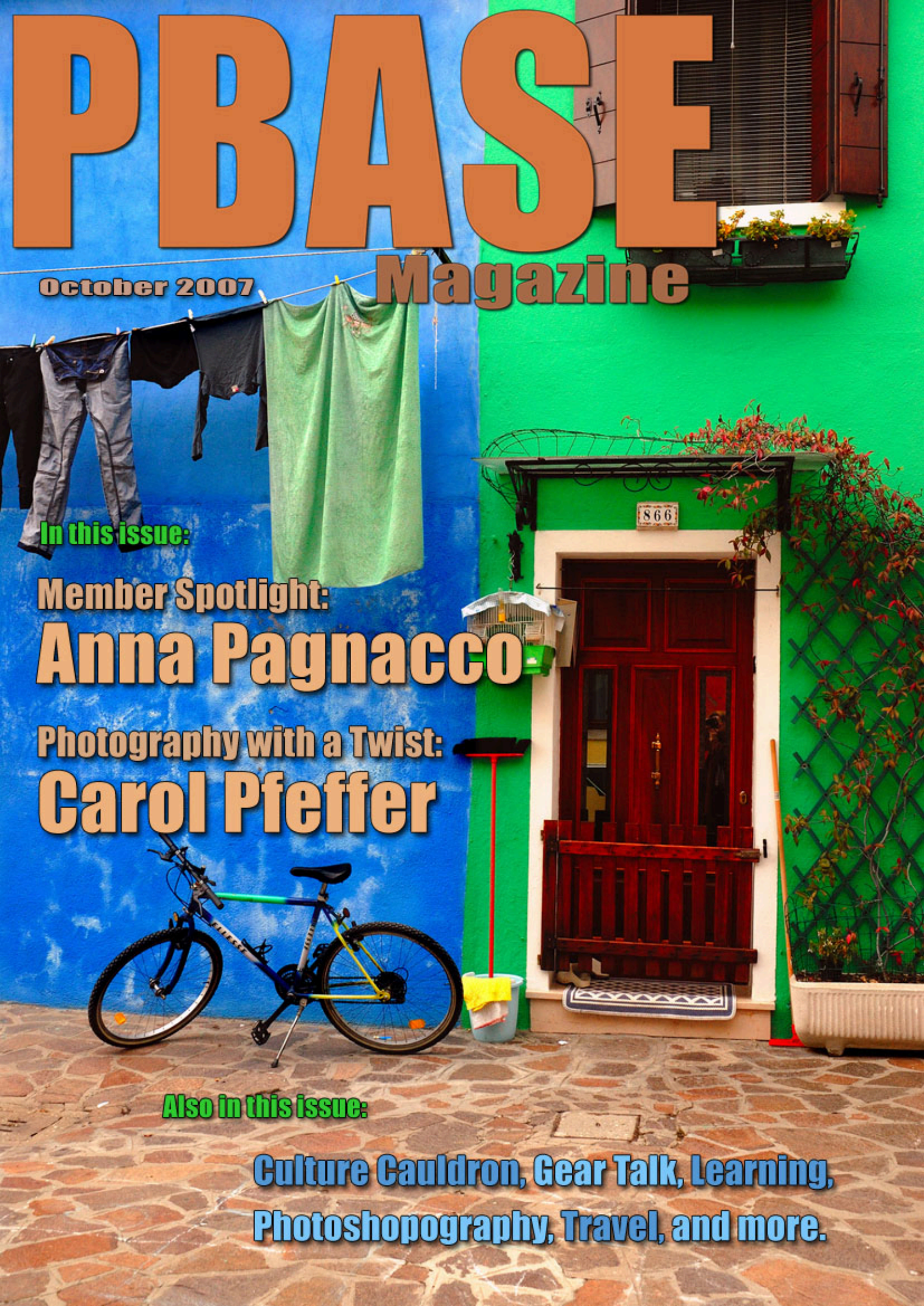
PBASE Magazine

October 2007



In this issue:

Member Spotlight:
Anna Pagnacco

Photography with a Twist:
Carol Pfeffer

Also in this issue:

Culture Cauldron, Gear Talk, Learning, Photoshopography, Travel, and more.

PBASE.com MAGAZINE

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

These months are always very busy for me at work – lots of business travel and little time to do pretty much anything else. In fact, most of this magazine has been put together in long haul flights. So from that perspective, at 30,000ft, I guess the PBase Magazine has reached new heights! (Yes, I know, I have a fabulous sense of humor)

The good news about my job is that I get to travel a lot. The bad news about my job is also that I get to travel a lot. Anyhow, this time, I did not carry my camera gear. To be very honest, if I had a small P&S camera, I would probably have taken one along, especially since I was visiting lovely places like Rome, Paris, London and others, which are typically a photographer's paradise. But there was no way I was going to lug around a 20D+3 lenses+flash+other gear on a business trip. Surprisingly, I actually enjoyed my 'camera-less' travels quite a bit. You see, whenever I carry my camera, I am too busy taking photographs to really enjoy the moment, so to speak. But this time, I actually took time to walk the parisienne walkways in the evening, marvel at the architectural beauty of the Roman Bath, or simply enjoy a peaceful dinner next to the Colloseum in Rome while an elderly gentleman with an accordion filled the night with sweet music. I also found time to observe the nuances of the people in different countries. For example, in Italy, it seems asking for fried fish is sacrilege. They believe frying a fish is as good as killing it, or serving old fish. Or, for example, the very amusing 'Roman Guard' – who stood inside the Colloseum, obviously drunk, trying to attract tourists by singing "I am the true American!" to astonished passer-bys. I personally find Rome to be a very beautiful city – I've been there a few times before, but this was the first trip when I actually had an evening to myself (typically, my trips are of the hotel-meeting-hotel-airport variety). I love Rome – it is just so beautiful, and refreshingly 'chaotic'.

And of course, there is Paris. There always is Paris. The city of lights and romance. I could spend countless evenings there, as long as I get to fly back home during the days! Paris, as fascinating as it is, is equally frustrating at times. For example, it is almost impossible to order a Taxi on a Monday morning, because they are all busy with clients (huh? I am a client too!). And if you do get a taxi, heaven forbid if you need him to drive outside of the city – three in five will refuse, because it is, well, out of the city and too far to drive (too far is 25km). If you think you are smart in tempting him with also offering to pay for his return + 30%, you will still get refused because it seems taxi unions outside of the city don't like city taxis taking their return business.

But these are just the expected pains of such a bustling city. There is simply nothing to beat walking the streets in Paris at night, settling down in a Bistro, ordering some Bordeaux and enjoying a nice dinner, while the very stylish waiters prance all around you, adjusting your napkins, swapping your forks, swirling and dancing (almost) while pouring some wine in your glass. And if you are a foodie, don't forget to try out some of the Michelin rates restaurants (but be prepared to blow more than 100 euros per person to have a good 3 course meal in those places). And if you, like me, are one who speaks an impressive repertoire of just one language – English, then you may just long to get back to an English speaking nation after a while, in which case, there is always the UK. (Technically, I speak two other languages – Bengali and Hindi, but being Indian languages, I doubt they would be much use in Europe). If you do travel to the UK, try and stay in London. Staying anywhere else is just not worth it. London, to me, is very similar to Manhattan, but with much more of culture and history nestled inside of it. Like New York, it is a fine mix of cultures, ranging from the "I say old chap!" varieties to the "Whatcha'doon'buddy?" and every thing in between. And of course, the food. I love the food in London. No matter what your eating preferences are, you will always find something excellent there to eat. Be it spiced noodles, kebabs, veal chops, hibachi style, or the harder to find liver cutlets, and even the typical lamb-in-mint-sauce, you have it all.

Now what has all of this got to do with the PBase Magazine? Ah! You had to ask! It has everything to do with this magazine. It is the reason why I had to delay the magazine by around 10 days. I just had too much of traveling to actually get to work on the PBase Magazine. But hey, better late than never!

Right. Back to business. First call – welcome to Dave Seeram, who will join our team as a contributor to our retouching section. Welcome, Dave, and you must be nuts wanting to work with us.

We have a loaded issue as usual, with the fabulous Anna Pagnacco as our PBase photog of the month. For the pro section- we did something with a twist. Instead of interviewing a photographer, we interviewed an 'artist' who uses photography as a medium to form their art. Carol Pfeffer is interviewed in that section. She is a conceptual artist known for her 'Cameraless photography' (we featured Carol in our learning section for issue 10).

In the culture section, two friends, Yuri Pautov and and Andrew Livov take us through a conversation about their beloved Russia, while Norman Rich takes us through a fascinating discourse on 'Nature streaming through the lens' in our learning section. Dave Seeram and Mike Warren present articles on droplets and actions for retouching, and Cesar Fernandez reminisces his Namibia trip with stunning photography in our Travel section. We also feature Joe Demb and his products in our Gear Talk section – I am sure many of you have heard of the Demb Diffuser products – so hear it straight from Joe's mouth – why he thinks (and I agree) his products rock!

Finally, good old Eric Kuhn has temporarily moved to London – but he will tell you more about that in Parting Shots.

So there goes. As usual, have fun reading!

~ Arjun Roychowdhury
http://www.pbase.com/arjunrc

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PBase Photog: Anna Pagnacco

Anna lives in Northern Italy only a few miles far from Venice. She grew up in a family where art was a part of their lives -Painting, music, writing, poetry, photography. As a child, drawing was her first passion, but she was enchanted by her mother's 'black box', most likely a Kodak or Leica camera. She would love to look at photos in B/W kept inside a Chinese lacquer box in her house. Anna started to take photos when she was still very young. When her children grew up and she had more spare time to spend, she was given a computer as a gift and through that discovered her love for digital photography. Since then, photography has become a real passion above and beyond her countless other hobbies.

PBase Magazine: Your PBase galleries display a wide variety of photographic styles as well as post-photography artistry. Is there any one style that is your favorite?

Yes, I prefer candid portraitures above all. During my travels, they are the kind of photographs that give me the most satisfaction. These are moments when I see the world only through my viewfinder, forgetting everything else around me. Moments where I create an instant contact with my subjects capturing their expressions and feeling that in that moment, I have reached deep inside them.

PBM: Tell us a bit about yourself and how you came about discovering and using PBase?

I discovered digital photography about eight years ago. My first camera was a Nikon Coolpix compact. I experimented with artificial light and started with macro photography. In 2000, I first started looking and using Internet based photo sites to post my work. That led to more interest in adding to the diversity of my online portfolio in the areas of post processing artwork on my own images. I was also very interested in mountain landscapes, since I always spent many months in the Northern Italian Alps every summer and winter. It was the beginning of a great passion.

I posted my work on a lot of Internet sites, which led to more exposure and appreciation by many. I was often requested to sell my photographs or artist renditions and sometimes I did. After much iteration with several photo sites, some good and some very bad, I discovered PBase - and I suddenly felt at home.

PBase was just the site I was looking for because being a big and popular site, you don't need to fall into the circle of being obliged to positively comment on other galleries just so that you get more visibility in return. This practice is common in many smaller sites - where many members comment on their friends works always saying they are masterpieces and never give you an honest critique. I am not saying this does not happen in larger sites, but the advantage of larger and very popular sites like PBase is peer commenting is not the only way to get attention.

PBM: You are one of the select photographers who are in the "all time favorite" list of PBase. How does that feel?

It was a great surprise when I saw my artistry gallery "In my mind" in the first page of All Time Favorites in PBase. I never imagined a gallery that was focused on artistic renditions would feature in a list that was predominantly 'straight photography' so to speak. Subsequently, some of my other galleries also featured in that list. I must say this was a great honor and personal satisfaction for me.

The Net

PBM: Your gallery "In My Mind" is a mesmerizing splash of colors, photographs and Photoshop post processing. Tell us more about this gallery and your thought behind it.

I first created this gallery as an avenue to give freedom to my artistic fantasy. I wanted to achieve this using 'virtual brushes' since I never really satisfactorily managed to express myself using real brushes and paints. I always use my own photos and I have lot of fun in experimenting with the different photo editing programs and

PROFILE

NAME: ANNA PAGNACCO

WEBSITE: HTTP://WWW.PBASE.COM/ANNAPAGNACCO

FROM: ITALY (PADUA)

YEARS AS PHOTOGRAPHER: 8+ IN DIGITAL

PHOTOGRAPHY STYLE: VARIETY

EQUIPMENT: NIKON D200, D100,D70, NIKKOR VR 70-200MM2.8G,

AF MICRO NIKKOR 105MM 1:2.8 D, NIKKOR 12-24MM F/4G ED-IF

AF-S DX, NIKKOR AF-S 18-70 1:3.5 45G-ED

By Anna:

Lonely Cypress

"PBase was just the site I was looking for because being a big and popular site, you don't need to fall into the circle of being obliged to positively comment on other galleries just so that you get more visibility in return"

The puddle

combining them to produce something interesting. I usually use a variety of software programs: playing, mixing and experimenting till I have what I need.

I sometimes pre-compose the image in my mind and other times, I just create the final look on the fly. It is so much fun!

PBM: You are also a member of Lensmodern. Tell us a bit about this site – does it assist you in selling your prints commercially?

Lensmodern contacted me twice through my PBase galleries. At first, I did not know about that site, or the distinction in being their member, so I refused. Some months later I was contacted again, this time privately, by a very famous German photographer, Andreas Heumann who lives in London. Andreas was also a Lensmodern member and he convinced me to sign the contract with them. I respected his opinion as he, besides from being an established photographer was also a personal teacher for me for some time.

I did not know much about the professional printing and how to prepare a shot just for this purpose. I had already sold my work before but only for editorial purposes never for prints.
He was very helpful and very patient. I am eternally grateful to him. He is truly a master at his work. I use Lensmodern for sales and it is a very effective medium for the same.

PBM: Do you earn your living as a photographer? If not, have you ever thought about it? If you do earn your living as a photographer tell us about how you made the leap.

No, I do not live on photography earnings. It is a hobby to me, even though my photos are for sale in Lensmodern or available if requested from editorial purposes. In addition, I am also working with my editor on publishing my first photobook, which should be up for sale in a few months.

Anyway, I will always consider myself as an amateur and never a professional photographer.

PBM: You have titled your travels to India as a "Journey into the soul". Tell us more about what you experienced there and your choice for the title.

I love the Asian culture a lot. I read a lot about it and have always dreamed about many places to visit. India and Burma are my favorite countries followed by Nepal. The dignity I found in the poorest of the poor in India can not be described or immortalized by a photograph. The children on the street, who struggle to survive, but with a smile on the face, touches me deeply.

I love the vibrant colors you see everywhere in their dresses, in the open markets, colors that fill your eyes and for a moment make you forget their poverty.

I am fascinated by Indian people, by those deep, bright dark eyes, by the faces that look like they are carved into wood. At first they are wary of strangers and cameras, but then they suddenly gift you with the sweetest of smiles. I feel that sometimes when I photograph some of them, I emotionally connect with their pain and joys of life, which is why I gave the title of "A journey into the soul" to my gallery

PBM: How easy/hard is it to be a working photographer in Italy? One would think that Italy being one of the premier fashion houses, the fashion industry would be a lucrative option for many young minds. Is that so?

Photography in Italy, as far as I know, is very prominent in the fashion and advertising fields.
There is a lot of creativity but I was told by some professional friends I know, that you must be a very well known photographer with a huge list of clients to survive as a professional photographer.

PBM: Your travels have taken you from India to Paris, from Tuscany to Burma. As a traveler how different did you find these places and do you have a favorite?

Besides India my favorite country is Burma.
It is a place where the people and country fit perfectly together. There are still places there where it seems time has frozen in the past. The magnificence of Bagan is unbelievable, the feeling is overwhelming. The silence and majesty of Inle Lake at sunrise or sunset is unforgettable. Travel to these places generally takes a long time and sometimes gets very tiring.

Golden Inle

On the contrary, Europe is easy to travel and besides the beauty of nature there, it is a wonderful open 'museum' of sorts that can satisfy art lovers of all kinds. In Europe, you can reach any place you like in just a few hours. We Europeans are very fortunate- different cultures, customs, languages, habits, make this place a very interesting one to visit and to photograph. We can drink tea at London and then, maybe the same day, shop in Paris or walk the gentle hills of Tuscany.

PBM: If there was one country that you could visit, and have not yet, which would it be and why?

Not one but many. I was born curious to see everything this planet has to offer. Unfortunately we may not always get everything we like, but must continue to hope. I have already visited many countries. Too bad that during the early

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Puja

"Europe is easy to travel and besides the beauty of nature there; it is a wonderful open 'museum' of sorts that can satisfy art lovers of all kinds. In Europe, you can reach any place you like in just a few hours. We Europeans are very fortunate- different cultures, customs, languages, habits, make this place a very interesting one to visit and to photograph. We can drink tea at London and then, maybe the same day, shop in Paris or walk the gentle hills of Tuscany"

days of my travels, I was not interested in photography like I am these days and did not have the equipment that I do today to do justice to capturing the emotions of the places I visited. I lost many opportunities for photography in Europe, America, Australia, and Africa and even in Asia.

I would like to visit South Africa, go back to Australia and other countries of South Asia, Vietnam, and Cambodia or Bhutan and Ladakh. But some of the latter ones are hard to do again due to their high altitude.

PBM: A traveler always has unique or interesting stories to tell about a certain day in their visits to a new country. Do you have such a story which you would like to share with us?

True! Here is one from recent memory:

Dasasvamedha Ghat *(stairway, leading to a river)* in India has a series of steps leading down to the Ganges River where pilgrims take the sacred bath, was full of people, that night of April 2006. They were there to attend a religious ceremony. Old people, children, beggars, sadhus and families were sitting in the dark lit only by the light of lit candles while listening to the priests chanting and music from loudspeakers.

Sadhu in India

You could still feel the heat of the torrid day and the loud volume of the music was very disturbing at least to me and to my son. We decided to go down the steps to the Ganges River and rent a boat with an oarsman to take us for a tour in the darkness. We were looking for a light breeze that might give us a bit of relief and take us away from the heat and the loudspeakers. We traced our path slowly and carefully, towards the river, in almost complete darkness. There were only two boats on the river that night with a few people and I started to get relaxed when in the distance I saw some lights on another ghat. It was the most famous burning ghat of Manikarnika. I asked the oarsman to get as close as possible. I had seen Manikmika in one of previous trips as well – but that was during sunrise and with many other tourists and boats.

That night the flames of the pyres (where the cremations took place) were throwing sparks high into the air like silent fireworks, which after a while would find their way into the waters. No priest chants, no tourist noise, besides the dry wood crackling. Only some orange flowers floating on the water with a candle lit in the middle.

In that moment, believer or not, you realize you are in front of a unique experience. You are the witness of the last journey towards a life where there are no pains but the coveted reward after the hardness and fatigue of living, because he who dies in Varanasi, will not be condemned to be born again.

This is the reason why all of the old and unwell pilgrims, rich or poor come from every part of India to breathe their last in Varanasi.
These are the moments that remain engraved in your mind and heart forever.

Another completely different memory (not as soul touching as the previous one): I remember an incident in Burma, where my private guide Peter Tutu saved me from a very painful accident – I was so engrossed in taking photographs, I never noticed I was in a collision path with a heavy cart dragged by two buffalos, in the middle of a busy market. At the last moment, Peter violently threw me to the ground, avoiding the hit by the skin of my teeth.

Hello and Tata!

PBM: What is your favorite camera and lens (and why)?

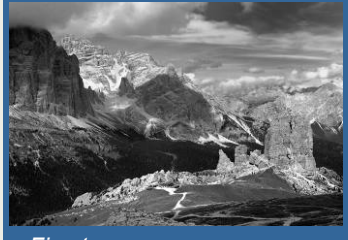
The Nikkor VR 70-200mm2.8G is my favorite lens just because it allows me to capture people when they are not aware of my presence. Not to mention it has a fantastic luminosity and sharpness.

PBM: The B&W tones in your portraits gallery are excellent. Do you have a favorite Photoshop technique or plug-in that you use to bring out these tones?

I had been experimenting with lots of ways until I met the great photographer Andreas Heumann, who told me that my first B/W conversions were not good for printing. He recommended my using commonly available software, along with advice on a workflow after that. These days, I use commonly available software, but depending on

The stare

Ubein



Five towers

the image I mix and match effects. From that perspective, there is no one workflow – it is rather customized.

PBM: There are several galleries in your PBase page that speak well of your 'different from the regular photography' approach. Examples include 'Black Paris', 'In my Mind' as well as your 'anything and everything' gallery. Give us a peek into how Anna Pagnacco's mind works – what in a subject interests you, how do you visualize, how do you execute?

It is not so easy to peek into my mind… even for me! When I look into my mind, I see many images that are there which have not yet been translated to photographs. Most of the times, the image is pre-composed in my mind.

Looking at you

I dislike banality. When I see some "point and click flat shots" I wonder why the photographer did not wait for the right light or did not think about the composition of the image. I know that one needs to be lucky to be at the right place at the right moment to capture its fullest beauty, but even then, I believe photographic ability can be shown at any time, for any place. This should not be missed.

Lighting is everything to me. Natural light of course, since I do not use studio lights, I think that even the simplest subject matters can become worthy to be shot with the right mix and play of shadows and light.

For example, I remember once sitting in a long boat with a leak waiting for the sunset light at U Bein Bridge in Amarapura (Burma) while the oarsman was throwing the water out of the boat so that we didn't sink into the river. But I got just what I wanted, the right light!

PBM: If there is one thing that you find lacking in yourself as a photographer that you would like to improve on, what would it be?

I never attended any photography school, so I don't know if I missed the most important thing about a perfect technique. I am not necessarily taking about rules because I am a kind of a rebel and rarely follow them.

I am a self made photographer and must thank a lot of kind friends, who with their technique and above all, their great patience helped me improve. And I cannot forget those who in the past years provided me with strict private critiques which are still helping me, every day.

I am always learning, and to some extent am a perfectionist. I still think I don't get the images that I want, and I think this will be a lifelong quest which drives me to improve.

PBM: If you were given a chance to spend a day with any photographer or artist in the world, who would it be and why? (Since this is a hypothetical question, feel free to include posthumous photographer/artists as well)

There are many photographers I admire here in PBase for their great works but I do not want to name anyone for fear of forgetting someone else.
I have met many other great photographers from all over the world on other photo sites whose works I still remember and still keep referring to over and over again.

I like Ansel Adams and Steve Mc Curry among a lot of other great masters. I respect those who can capture the purity and effect in a 'pure' photograph and do not need to tweak it extensively in photo editors to bring out the scene as they saw it (unless of course, if you are creating an artistic impression) .

PBM: What advice would you have for our readers who want to take the next step in photography?

I still need advice myself! But I can tell them that they must "feel" with their heart and let this wonderful art of photography win their mind and their heart, because they will be rewarded by the joy they will get!

Hello ma'am!

Woman in black

Boat on Ganga

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

ARTIST: Carol Pfeffer

A passion for composition, color and conceptual art coupled with a formal background in the science of light led New York based artist Carol Pfeffer directly to her signature medium, cameraless photography. Carol combines art and science with an unorthodox handling of subject and material.

She graduated from Boston University with a BA with Distinction in Physics and Philosophy; from Western New England College of School of Law, JD cum Laude, and is an Honors graduate of The State University of New York at Westchester Community College where she earned her Associate Degree in Visual Arts.

Carol is a seasoned trial attorney practicing law for over twenty years and Adjunct Faculty member at Purchase College State University of New York

PBase Magazine: Can you start by describing your art and how it involves photography?

My art is often described as cameraless photography, yet no one I know would describe me to a stranger as a photographer. Technically, it's true but it's quite deceptive. More accurate would be something like photographer without a camera…still a pesky oxymoron.

Camera Work

When looking at my work, you know you are looking at art, but you may be left with the question, is it a photograph? This is because the content is inconsistent with the format. The non narrative subject matter contradicts our intrinsic expectations of photography.

A conventional photograph is documentary in nature, a snapshot of reality, a moment in time, an instantly recognizable representation or picture of something that exists in the real world. This is how most of the public recognizes a photograph.

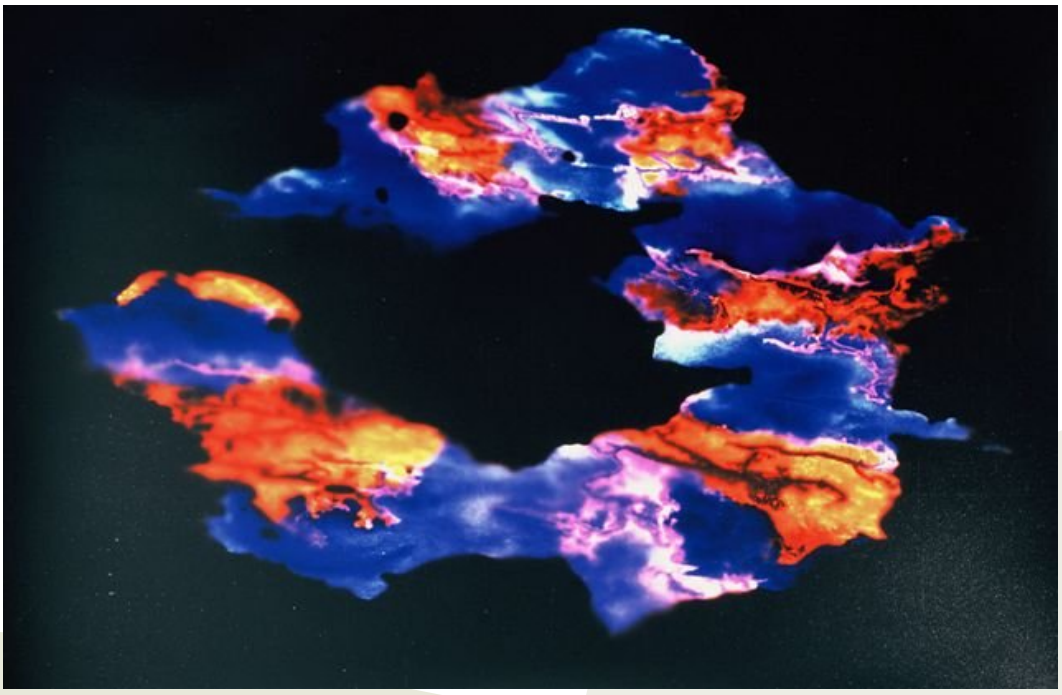
My work, however, is exclusively non objective in nature. It is easily recognized as abstract non representational art, but not as a photograph per se.

This reminds me of something that happened to me this morning as I was driving to work. I was behind a school bus chugging along its route discharging and picking up little passengers when I saw the bus turn into a cemetery entrance… leaves you with an honest question, dropping off or picking up?

Think of making a photograph as a Two Step process: Step One, taking the picture with a camera, and Step Two printing the image from the camera onto paper. I by- pass the camera step completely and go directly to the printing. I print materials, other than film, to make art.

PBM: Briefly walk us through the process of how you produce your work?

Skipping the camera step means I need to develop ways to accommodate printing non conventional materials.



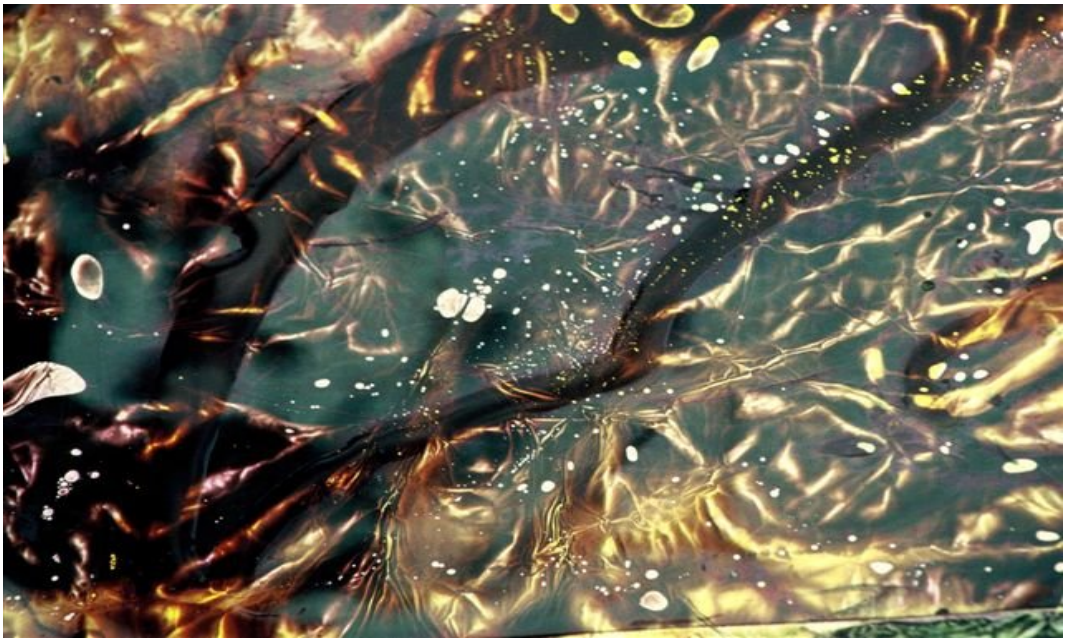
chromogenic contact print watercolor and acrylic mediums

CAROL'S CORNER:

"My art is often described as cameraless photography, yet no one I know would describe me to a stranger as a photographer. Technically, it's true but it's quite deceptive. More accurate would be something like photographer without a camera…still a pesky oxymoron"

Painting used for contact print

There are two ways to make a darkroom print. One is to place the negative from the camera into the enlarger, and project the image down onto the photosensitive paper and expose it with light. This



chromogenic projection print film

is called a Projection Print.

The other way is to place the negative down directly onto the paper and then expose. This is called a Contact Print. Many of your readers may know this also as a "photogram."

A photogram is an example of a contact print because it is made by placing objects in contact with the paper. Go into any Photo 101 class and you will see students making photograms using common objects such as pencils, jewelry, hands, rulers, etc. These opaque objects are seen as silhouettes on the print because light cannot penetrate them. You are left with the footprint or shadow of the object.

In contrast, I don't print appropriated objects and I will almost never use opaque material. By using translucent materials I am able to print the content completely and I am not limited to the shadow or contour of the form. I use materials that vary in density and opacity. The diversity of density becomes a formal element of the work.

Much of my work is produced by this contact method. The 'objects' that I print are made by a variety of methods. This includes traditional methods one would use to make non objective art such as painting, drawing, sculpture, and collage except that they are made with translucent mediums. I also use scientific materials and effects. Often, the same methods can be used to generate projection prints by treating them as a film alternative in the negative carrier.

I have some other unconventional darkroom habits. For instance, I use alternative light sources for exposure. Papers have a range of photosensitivity and light sources of different wavelengths will read differently. Also, I do not use an easel.

In addition, I may work above or below the focal length of the bellows. This gives me access to a broad range of emphasis across the print. It collapses space, a direct denial of the conventional photographic format, yet uses familiar lenticular language, eg. photographic blur or vignetting. I like to use these flat modernist elements without completely eliminating the perspective of space.

PBM: How did you start doing this? What inspired you?

I have always had a strong intent to communicate without figurative references and desire to suggest wordless intuitions.

The subject of my work evolved from the recognizable image, gradually becoming more and more abstract, to non recognizable reality and ultimately to a complete denial of representation.

The methods, on the other hand, evolved from a continuing interest in the optics and chemistry of the darkroom and exploring the interaction of light with matter.

I am in a constant dialogue between process and content. To some extent, the content determines the process and visa versa.

PBM: Do other people do the type of art that you do, or are you the only one?

There are a handful of photographers who make photograms, probably the most well known is Adam Fuss, but the works are representational-flowers, lace, etc. Frankly, I am only aware of one person, a German born photographer, who works in even a remotely similar fashion. His work has a

chromogenic projection print ink on treated acetate

"I have always had a strong intent to communicate without figurative references and desire to suggest wordless intuitions.

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very different aesthetic and does not have the conceptual defense that supports my projects.

PBM: How do you define "art" and how do you define "photography"?

This is a complex question. And the answer can easily turn into scrambled eggs. It addresses the High Art /Low Art dichotomy, and the basic style in which we represent the visible world.

Abstraction, minimal art, pop culture, consumer snapshots, the relationship of abstraction and design, documentary photography, hyper-reality figuration, decorative kitsch, photo-expressionist painting, the Mannerists, the ready-mades, use of the camera obscura by the Dutch masters, fine art photography and then some are all in the debate.

I am frequently barraged with "looks- like" comments, eg. looks like the ocean, looks like something through a microscope, etc.

My work annoys traditional photographers because it kicks the crutch of resemblance out from under them. In representational art forms, recognition is required. But interpretation of non objective art does not need recognition-no need to match forms with meaning.

Gombrich argued that illusionism, the depiction of things in a convincing way, was one of the greatest achievements of Western civilization. Consider for instance, a photograph of a person and a painting of a person. Traditionally, the portrait should look like the person . The more the resemblance, the better the painting. Same for a photograph. The more it looks like the person, the better the photo. But is it better art?

Before photography, we relied on the precision of great portrait painters. I guess that makes the camera the ultimate painter.

Which leads to the question "Why make a painting when you can take a picture?" Or as a painter friend of mine noted, "Why take a picture, when you can make a painting?"

PBM: Would you (or have you) ever consider just regular photography with a digital camera?

No.

PBM: If people wanted to branch off and try something different (along the lines of what you do), what advice would you give them?

This is not taking pictures. This is a process. A long process. It requires a technical command of the medium, patience, more patience, research, experience, and the ability to work without standards. It takes effort to develop techniques as well as time to learn how to apply them.

Also, as with any unconventional practice, using materials for their unintended purpose can be dangerous. Be Careful! Darkroom chemicals and electrical components must be treated like all Hazardous Material with strict adherence to safety precautions. Always know where the emergency eye wash station is where you print.

PBM: Have you been able to turn your passion into any sort of profitable business?

My work is not for sale.

PBM: What is it you like most about producing the work that you do?

choromogenic projection print with optically active plastic exposed with polarized light

Sometimes I feel that I have created an individual reality. I have signature techniques, materials, methods and even an aesthetic. It's a very private process for me.

PBM: Finally, where do want to take your art from here?

I try to avoid phenomenological visual gimmicks yet at the same time I try to avoid concept-heavy work. I'd like to perfect that effort.

chromogenic projection print work on infrared film

Credits:
Press Portraits by Andrew Epstein

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

PHOTOSHOPOGRAPHY: Watermark Droplets

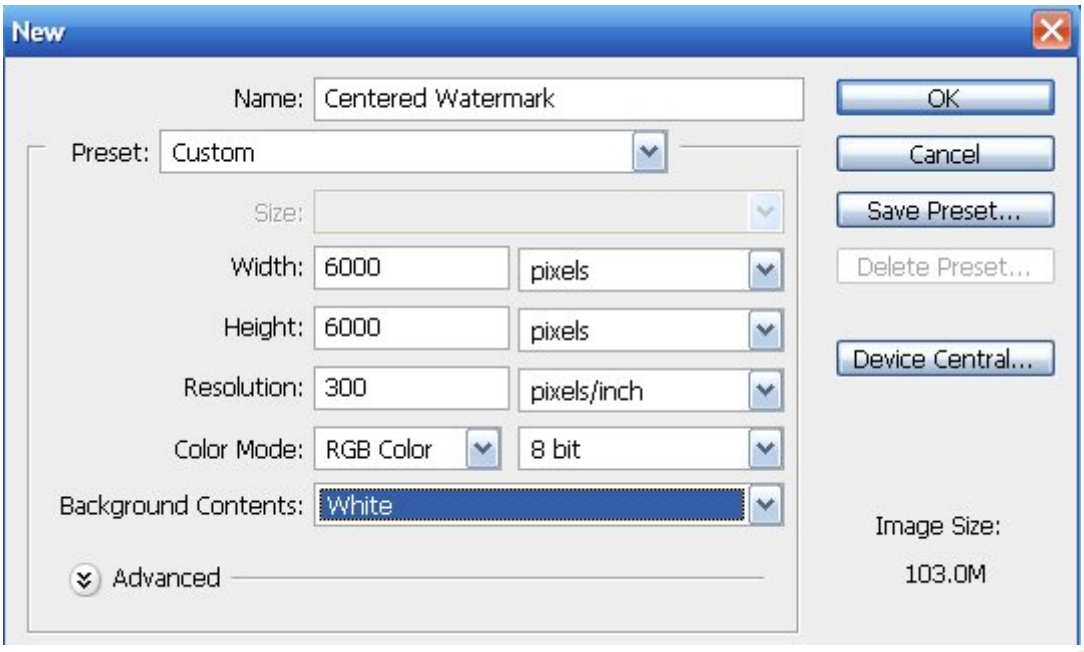
Dave Seeram is a 32 year old digital photography enthusiast born and raised in Ottawa, now residing in beautiful Vancouver, British Columbia. Dave's digital photography experience started with his first digital camera, a Nikon Coolpix 880, graduating through several point and shooters up to his latest Pentax K10D DSLR. He enjoys shooting mainly landscapes and architecture, however, he is recently starting to enjoy "people" photography. Dave's other arsenal of tools include Adobe Photoshop CS3, Lightroom, and Photomatix. Through formal schooling along with over 10 years of self training and research, Dave has acquired an extensive knowledge of Photoshop and image manipulation. His Photoshop tutorials can be found throughout the web, and on his own website PhotographyBB. Dave's mission is to create a friendly online environment where beginners can learn without being afraid to ask questions, and experts can be there to share their knowledge. You can visit and chat with Dave at PhotographyBB anytime, he's always open to questions and lending assistance!

Watermark Droplets - For Adobe® Photoshop® CS, CS2, and CS3

You may have seen several ways of watermarking your photos, and you probably use a handful of them. They need to be resized, repositioned, and adjusted based on your image's orientation and resolution. I'm going to teach you two techniques which will hopefully change all of that. The first is how to create a watermark that will show up in the same position on every image you apply it to. The second (if you are using CS or higher) will be how to use something called a "Droplet" so that you can enjoy a cup of coffee while your computer does the work of watermarking all the photos you want, with ONE simple mouse click!

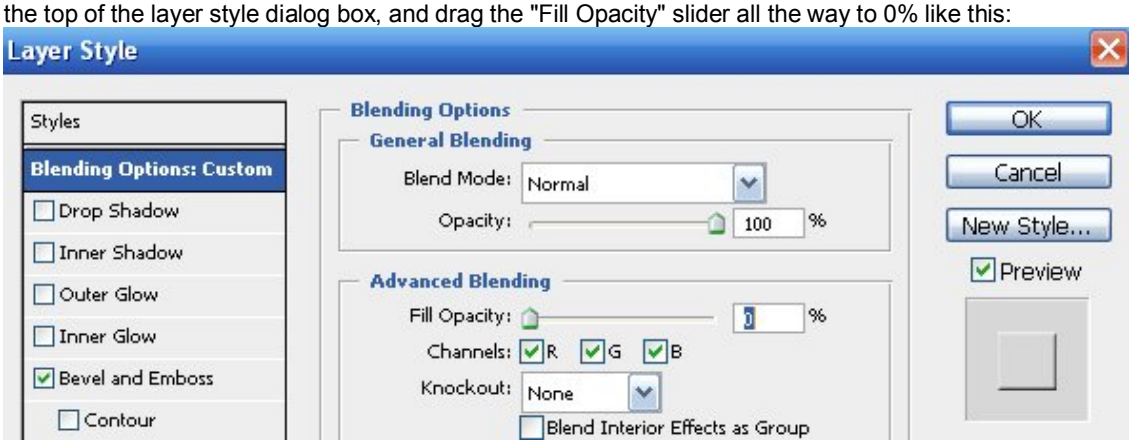
The great thing about this technique is that no matter what size or resolution your image is, the watermark we create here will show up the same proportion on all of the images you apply it to. Be it images sized down for the web, or larger 300ppi images, the final result will always be the same.
The first thing we need to do is create the watermark we are going to use. We are going to do something unusual here, and create a watermark image that is fantastically large, larger than any image you would normally want to watermark. Let's fire up Photoshop and begin:

1) Create a new image by going to File>New... and make an image. Title it appropriately, perhaps "Centered Watermark" in this case. Use the following settings: Width and Height of 6000 pixels at a resolution of 300 pixels/inch, in RGB 8-bit color with white as the document's background color. Like this:



2) On your new black document, create the watermark image you would like to use. It can be text, a copyright symbol, your company's logo, or whatever you desire. Here I will use the copyright symbol and the name of my website: PhotographyBB.com

3) Now we need to edit this logo so that it will look suitable on any of our images. If your logo contains several layers, merge them together without merging them to the background layer. To do this easily, turn off the visibility of the background (white) layer by clicking off the eyeball icon on that layer in the layers palette. Then go to the menu: Layer>Merge Visible, and once this has run, turn back on your background layer visibility. Next, make sure that your "logo" layer is the active layer, and go to the menu Layer>Layer Style>Bevel and Emboss... You can use the default settings or adjust them to your taste, however, there is one thing you will need to change. Click on the "Blending Options: Default" setting at the top of the layer style dialog box, and drag the "Fill Opacity" slider all the way to 0% like this:



Now you can delete the background layer by dragging it to the trash can in the layers palette. You should be left with a transparent "beveled and embossed" watermark logo! Save this file as a Photoshop Document (PSD) to your system. I recommend you create a "Watermarks" folder on your computer, perhaps inside your main images directory. This is where you will save this watermark image, along with any others you create. Name this file appropriately, like "Copyright Watermark.psd."
Save it, and close this file.
4) The next step is to open an image which you would like to watermark. With your image open, we need to create an action to apply the watermark (you'll see why in just a moment!).
To create a simple watermarking action, open your Actions Palette (Window>Actions). Create a new action set, by clicking on the little folder icon at the bottom of the Actions Palette. Name this folder "Watermark Actions." Next, you can create the action by clicking on the "Create New Action" icon just beside that little folder, again at the bottom of the Actions Palette. When the dialog box appears, name this action something similar to the name (it doesn't have to be exact) of the watermark image you created, and click Record.
5) With the action recording, we need to get the watermark image onto your photo. We are going to use a very cool command called "Place." Using the place command is what makes the magic happen, so that our watermark image will appear the same size, no matter what original image resolution or orientation we are using. Not only will it make the watermark the same size, but it will be centered to each and every image, every time! That's the reason that this action will work so well on all of your images; you will no longer need to use different techniques, or constantly resize your watermark each time you apply it to a different image. Let's see it in action!
Go to the menu: File>Place... When the dialog box appears, choose the watermark image that you created earlier, and click Place. You'll see your watermark image appear on top of the image you are watermarking. All you need to do now is set the watermark by clicking Enter

6) Save your photo using the File>Save As... menu, and choose the JPEG format. Use the "Save as a copy" option by clicking the little checkbox on before you click save. That way, it will not save over your original image. You can now click the Stop icon at the bottom of the Actions Palette to stop the action recording.
Your watermarking action is now complete and you can now use it on any photo simply by opening your image, bringing up the Actions Palette, and clicking the "Play" icon at the bottom of the Actions Palette. The watermark will now be placed in the center of each image, at the same size, everytime!
"But wait, this still sounds like a lot of work! Sure, I don't need to resize and reposition my watermark anymore, but I still have to open hundreds of photos, and do this each time is still a drag..." Or is it? It may be a drag, but in this case it's going to be a "Drag and Drop." (Apologies for the corny wordplay!)
Remember I mentioned something about "Droplets"? Here's where the "drag and drop" comes in!
7) Just when you thought you were finished, there's yet another step. I promise you that this one will make your life much easier, and save you loads of time in the process. We are going to create a Photoshop Droplet. A "Droplet" is simply an executable icon to which you can drag and drop not only images, but whole folders of images, which will then call a Photoshop Action, apply the action, and save each image. The beauty of Droplets and Actions is that they are very small in size, since they are just a series of commands. They can therefore be shared very easily through email with colleagues or partners for processing image shoots, and the results will be the same everytime (although if you are sharing them, don't forget to include any supplementary files used in the actions, such as the watermark image in this case). Let's create one!
In Photoshop (CS or higher) go to the menu: File>Automate>Create Droplet...
When the dialog box appears, choose the following options:

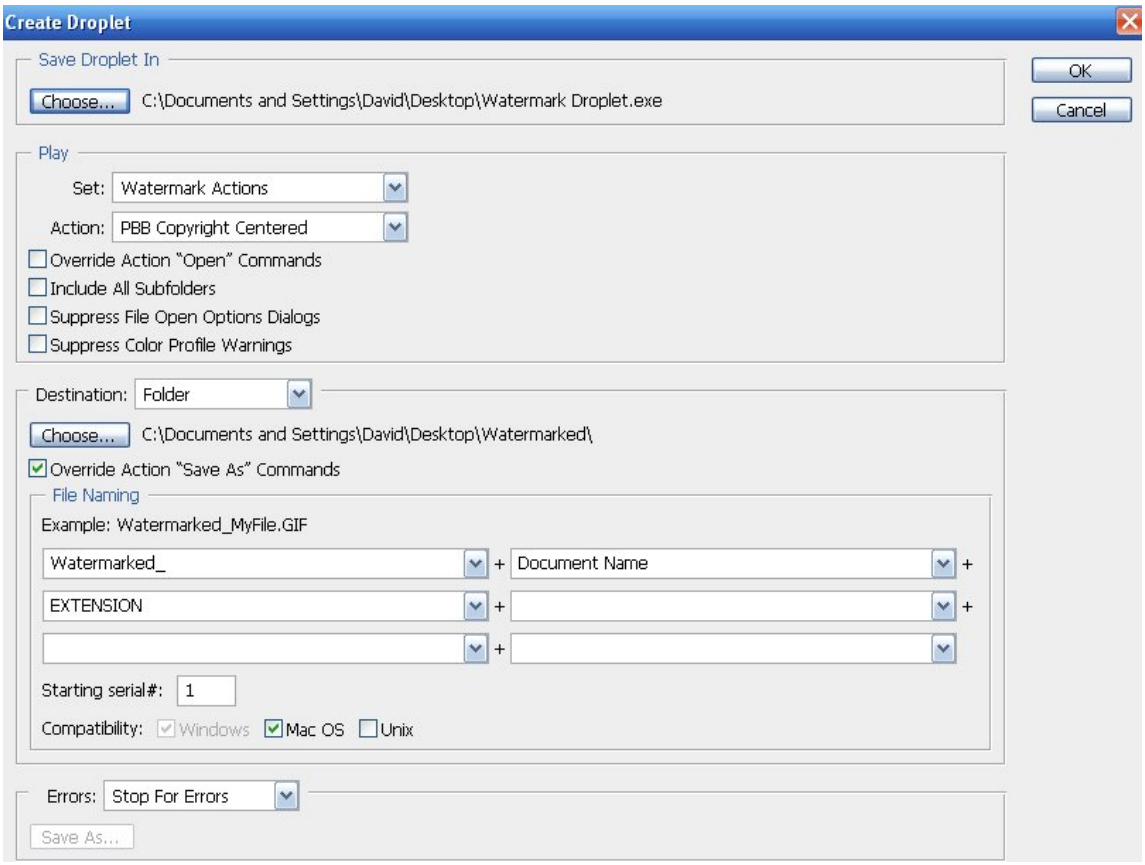
Save Droplet In: Choose a folder where you would like to save your Droplet.

Play: Here is where you will choose your Watermark Action Set, and the Action within that set. In this example, I named my watermarking actions folder "Watermark Actions," and the action name I chose was "PBB Copyright Centered" (which was my action with the copyright symbol and my web address below).
Leave the next four checkboxes unchecked.

Destination: Choose "Folder" and click the "Choose" button below it to select the folder where you would like your final images to appear.

Make sure the "Override Action Save As Commands" box is CHECKED. This overrides the save function which runs in your action, and uses the Droplet save function instead, which gives us more control over the filenames.

File Naming: There are lots of options for naming the images that your Droplet creates. It's a matter of preference, but personally I like to use the first box as a description of what my Droplet does (Watermark), followed by the original document name, followed by the extension (based on the extension of your original images. ie JPEG, TFF, etc...). I also like to turn the Mac OS compatibility on, so that my filenames are compatible to both Mac and PC.



After that, simply click OK and your Droplet will appear as an icon in the folder of your choice.

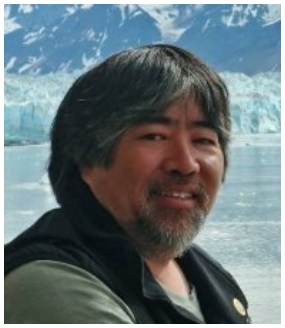
At the beginning of this article I mentioned that you could edit entire folders of images with ONE simple mouse click. To run your Droplet, click-hold and drag the folder containing the images you would like to watermark, and drop it onto your Droplet. Photoshop will do the rest, watermarking all of the images (regardless of their size and orientation) in the folder and saving them to the new folder you specified. Now you have a tool to use which can save you lots of valuable time and energy!

Experiment!: Try creating a folder of different watermark images. For example, I have a watermark actions folder on my system which contains the watermark we used here today, plus watermarks in black text, white text, some with my website address on it, and some without. I even have written these simple actions with the watermark placement in a different location on each one; some placed at the bottom of my images, and some at the top. The possibilities are endless. Try creating different watermark images, actions to call them respectively. Once you have done that, you'll need to create a Droplet for each, but depending what you are preparing your images for, you'll find it saves oodles of time. That's time you can use to shoot more photos!

Hint: When using the File>Place command the watermark will always be positioned to the center of your image, however, you can also position your watermark text at the top (or anywhere) of the watermark image, instead of in the center.

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

PHOTOSHOPOGRAPHY: Innovative Action Ideas



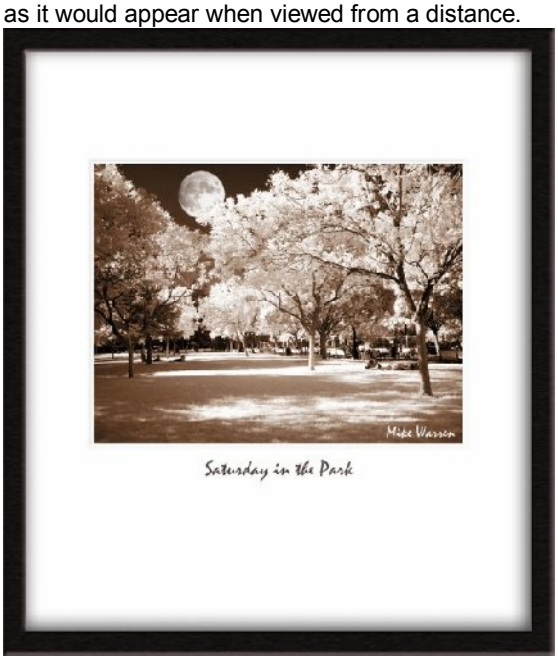
Mike Warren is a 53 year old Graphic Designer, Art Director and Pre-press Manager for a commercial printing company in the San Francisco Bay Area that specializes in Flexographic Label Printing. He enjoys shooting landscape and nature shots with his Pentax K10D. His real passion is post-processing his images in Photoshop, and then turning them into Photo-Art. Mike has been an active member of the DPReview Retouching forum since June 2003. He has published many Photoshop Actions on Action-Central and will introduce you to some of them in this article.

Editor's note: This article contains a series of actions which Mike makes available at atncentral.com. Interested readers can download the actions from there and study the steps required to make the same themselves. Note that this article does not contain instructions on how to create them – the reader can study the steps directly from the downloadable actions.

Actions can save time and increase productivity by automating repetitive tasks. They can also be used for reproducing techniques and creating special effects that can be shared with other Photoshop users. An Action is the result of recording various steps while using Photoshop. The Action can then be played back to carry out those same steps.

Once you have downloaded and unzipped your Action, place your Action in a common folder. Once you have established that folder, open Photoshop, open the Action palette, click the small triangle in the upper right hand corner to access the fly-out menu, then choose LOAD ACTIONS. Using the file dialogue, navigate to wherever you have placed your Actions. Click the "Load" button in the file dialogue, and your Actions will appear at the bottom of the Actions Palette. You can also drag and drop Actions onto the Actions Palette in Photoshop. In CS3, double clicking an Action will load it into your Action Palette. For most Actions, it is best to start with a flattened RGB 8-bit image.

One of the first Actions I made was in response to a request from a forum member asking where to find a simple Black Frame with a White Mat, as you would find in an Art Gallery or in a Portrait Studio, for display on the web. I was surprised that nothing like that had been created before, so I wrote my first Mat & Frame Action. The Action set is called Mike's Frame Actions and is comprised of three different Actions. Two of them are for Landscape images, and one is for Portrait images. The Portrait Mat & Frame has the appearance of a large 16" X 20" image in a typical White Museum Mat and Black Frame as it would appear when viewed from a distance.



Mike's Landscape Mat & Frame (above)
Mike's Vertical Portrait Studio Mat & Frame (right)

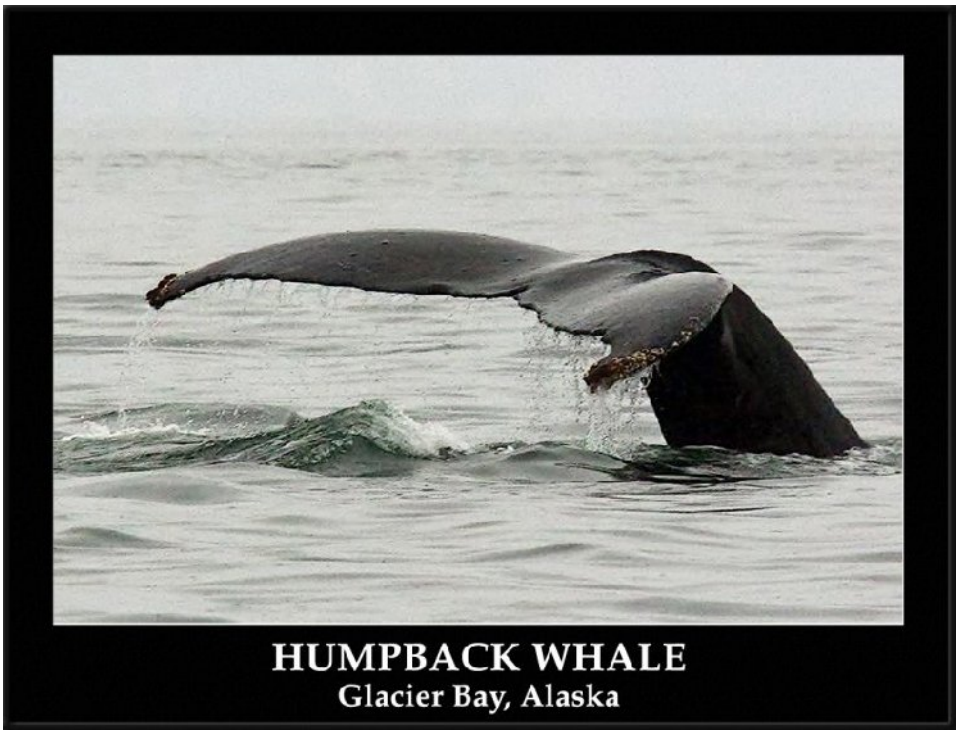
MIKE SAYS:

Actions are a great way to learn. When asked how I do certain retouches, I can give that person an Action so they can watch each step run on their own computer, using their own image. They can learn the technique by running the Action in step-by-step mode. They can also modify the Action to their own taste and eventually learn how to write their own Actions. These Actions and many more are available for download from Action-Central, thanks to the generosity and support of the site's owner, Jim Lewis. http://www.atncentral.com/

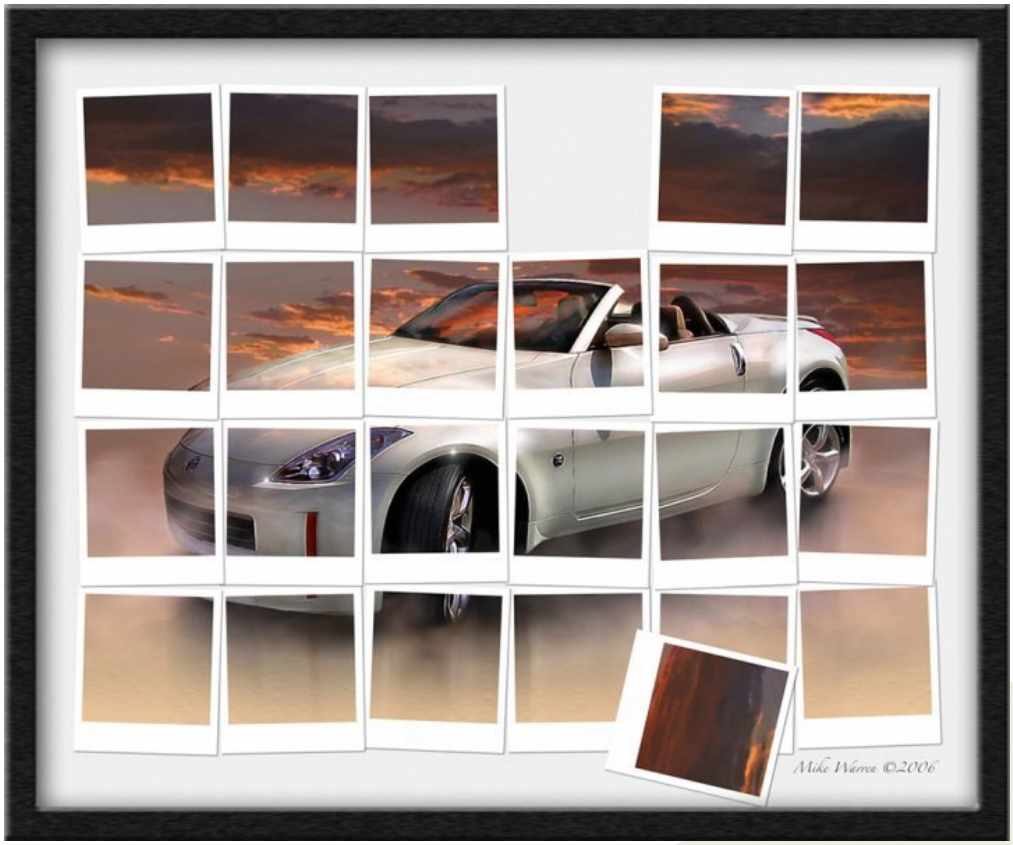
Another very popular Action I created was the Triptych Mat & Frame Action. There are two Actions, one for vertical images and one for horizontal images. You can use one or three images under the three mat openings. The download file also has Frame Templates for Elements and PSP users.

Instructions: Run the Action or open the PSD Template file in Photoshop, Elements or Paint Shop Pro. Click on the bottom layer. Paste your images above the bottom layer, but below the Mat layer(s). Rotate and resize behind the mat openings (transform while holding shift to constrain proportions). Zoom in to make sure green does not show. This ensures your image is larger than the opening. Erase/Delete any excess image, so it won't show up above the other images. Save. Flatten before resizing. I designed many different collage templates with multiple openings that are also available for download at Action-Central.

Many forum members wanted a simple Black Mat and Black Frame with a large margin on the bottom so they could add a title and signature. I created an Action that looked just like the framed posters at the mall. The Action soon evolved so you could change the color of the border, the color of the mat, and the color and size of the frame. The Action adds text that you will replace with your own text in your choice of font and color. This Action later evolved into the Glass Mat Poster Frame Action.



My most complex and fun Frame Action is my Polaroid Collage Action. You start with an image that is 9" X 9" that gets cut up into 36 Polaroid prints and gets put back together for a real interesting look. The Polaroid print images can be arranged any way you like for a more custom look. You can also create a collage within the 9" X 9" image before running the Action to end up with 36 different images.



Richard Avedon was a well-known photographer in the 60's. He experimented with wild color schemes and created some very well known portraits of the Beatles during the hippie era, when psychedelic posters were at their peak popularity. I dedicated an Action to him and called it my Richard Avedon Pop-Art Action. The Action utilizes extreme curve configurations and various layers of different channels to create 16 different images to choose from. This shot gun method makes it easy to pick the images that happen to work the best based on the colors in the original image. Creating multiple variations at once, saves a lot of time when you are not sure how a particular image is going to turn out.

Photo by Richard Avedon

My latest endeavor involved writing two different Actions to convert photos into different types of Photo-art. The first Action was an Illustration Action that had a Watercolor or Airbrushed look, depending on the settings as you run the Action. The second Action had the ability to create Pencil, Charcoal or a Pen & Ink look. For additional mixed-media looks, experiment by running the image through both Actions, and then merge them together using different blend modes and opacities.

Actions are a great way to learn. When asked how I do certain retouches, I can give that person an Action so they can watch each step run on their own computer, using their own image. They can learn the technique by running the Action in step-by-step mode. They can also modify the Action to their own taste and eventually learn how to write their own Actions. These Actions and many more are available for download from Action-Central, thanks to the generosity and support of the site's owner, Jim Lewis.
http://www.atncentral.com/

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Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

GEAR-TALK: Joe Demb

Joe Demb learned photography as an assistant in a Boston commercial studio before starting his own business in 1975. He specialized in environmental portraits of babies, children, and families at first. Later, he added function photography of Bar Mitzvahs and weddings. He began experimenting with flash reflectors in the early eighties and was selling his own designs in local stores by the late eighties. The coming of the internet and internet forums led him to switch to direct sales two years ago. Joe lives in Belmont with his wife and business partner, Sue, and his cat Sadie, who is in charge of company entertainments. Now retired from photography, Joe continues to develop and sell his designs of flash reflectors, diffusers, combination products, as well as his camera bracket products through his web site.

Ah dreams! Wouldn't it be great if you could put a rugged, light, sharp-looking piece of gear on your flash that would get the most out of your flash in every situation? You could take a picture of a person in a regular room and control the angle of the main light, left, center, or right in either landscape or portrait format. At the same time, you could control the amount of fill light by any degree you like, just as if your flash had become a miniature portrait system. Then, you could take the same system and control the exact amount of fill in your outdoor shots. The same setup would be powerful enough for shooting the bridal party coming down the aisle of a huge church, the ceremony, the formals, groups, table shots, and full-length dance shots. For close-ups you could dial back the power for softness. If you needed direct flash, you wouldn't even have to take it off. It would fold out of the way. If your thing is landscapes, this may not be your dream. When I was a wedding photographer, it sure was mine.

I bought them all – every gadget made to make my flash give more natural lighting. Why? Paparazzi use direct flash to photograph the beautiful people. The folks who were writing my cheques needed a kinder, gentler light. Nothing I bought did it all, so I decided to make my own and tested it out in about a thousand weddings. From film days, with Hasselblads and Lumedyne power packs right through DSLR's and an SB800, my Flip-it reflector, with its adjustable hinge, served me well. The Flip-it and the Demb Flash Diffuser series, which adds an adjustable clear diffuser on the front continues to serve thousands of photographers. On any Sunday in June, five thousand DFD photographers, shooting four hundred shots apiece are producing two million shots using my system. They actually may be shooting more than four hundred. I'll have to check!

The whole subject of flash modifiers has become really hot. Check out the forums, and you will see a constant stream of topics that ask the same question: "Which is best?" Then the fans of different modifiers pitch in with support for their favorite. What are you to make of all this? How do you choose?

On my web site, I put a silly slogan: Outdoors, small room, big room, hall, Demb Diffusers do it all! Being a little silly helped me get a lot of smiles for my photos. I guess I just can't break the habit. It does pose a serious question, however, when you are thinking of spending your money. Which one really "does it all"?

I spend about half of my time communicating with individual photographers who email me with their lighting problems. People send me shots and questions and I try my best to help, to show them how one modifier really can do it all. Hey, that's crazy! You are supposed to get a product that pops off a mold, do seminars for the masses, and establish a wholesale business to giant superstores, right? That's the way to make serious money, right?

I guess that if making a hand-made product that is built like a tank and weighs in at one and a half ounces, and spending my time with individuals makes me crazy, I'll plead guilty. I'm crazy. The thing is, that when I hear your problems, they were my problems. Being able to help feels good.

FAQ's

Does the flash always point up, or sometimes forward with your products?

The answer to the first Q is, "UP". To the side for direction is fine, NOT forward.

Which size is best for my flash?

All three sizes of reflector, the two inch Junior, the four inch Pro, and the five inch Jumbo will fit on any size flash. They have the same sponge rubber lined velour strap. You pull the strap tight and secure with Velcro for a custom fit. They all cover a wide-angle lens. At ISO 400 f5.6, the Jr. with the reflector forward in the power position is good for about fifteen to eighteen feet of depth. The Big and Jumbo sizes will give you about three feet of additional depth coverage. This can be critical for function work. The Jumbo was offered in response to a huge demand for the largest reflector which would remain stable and not be too heavy. I make no claims for its superiority over the Big size, which is the most popular by far. People love it, they want it, everyone is happy. That said, I think putting a Jumbo on a small-size flash may be a little bit of overkill.

Why do you show it attached to the side of the flash instead of the back?

If you attach a modifier to the back of your flash, the flash points off to the side when you take a picture in the portrait position. We want it to point up. Mount it on the side, and it will be able to point up in both landscape and portrait. Your flash must be able to swivel as well as tilt. You bought

SIDEBAR:

"I bought them all – every gadget made to make my flash give more natural lighting. Why? Paparazzi use direct flash to photograph the beautiful people. The folks who were writing my cheques needed a kinder, gentler light. Nothing I bought did it all, so I decided to make my own and tested it out in about a thousand weddings"

a swivel flash, right? If not, get one, or get a bracket.

If I can get great results from the Flip-it on the back of the flash, why do I need the diffuser on the front?

The diffuser that goes on the front is a really fun accessory to use. For the extra $5, I think you would love it. For photography in regular rooms in a house, it is all you really need. You could flip the reflector all the way back, just play with different angles on the strap and get great results. You want just a minimum amount of fill to go along with the ceiling bounce anyway. Most of the 'mistakes' I see have to do with too much fill. Less is best. If you do need more power, just tip the diffuser so it hoods over the face of the flash and you will be surprised at how much the light changes. It just goes on the front with a strip of Velcro. If you don't want to use it, just zip it off and stick it on the side of the strap.

If so many people say you don't need a bracket with Demb Diffusers, why the heck did you design the Demb Flash Bracket?

No matter what many people say, anyone's modifier only puts the light about four inches above the lens and off to the side in the vertical position. If your subject is close to a wall, side shadows are inevitable. This bugged me. I set out to design a bracket from scratch that would be affordable and solve the most common bracket problems at the same time. Expensive ones, heavy ones, slow ones, ones that didn't keep the camera or flash from twisting, ones that would force me to use the camera upside down for verticals, ones that didn't balance, ones that only let the light swing one way and not the other. They are out there. I wanted one that would swing the light both ways either landscape or portrait, weigh less than seven ounces, and balance even shooting one-handed. One that would be really fast and have anti-twist built into the basic design. I think I nailed it.

The future looks bright for flash modifiers. A recent review of the new Nikon series suggested that ISO 1600 would look like today's ISO 400. This means that I may never again have to answer my least favorite negative question, "How many stops do you lose". It isn't a matter of what you lose, friends, it is what you gain.

Examples and explanations of how to effectively use the DFD Pro

All photos were taken at f5.6, ISO 400

Bride at home full length: Aiming the flash with DFD Pro off to the ceiling on the right side gave highly directional lighting from the right with fill from the camera position. The DFD Pro was set at its minimum position, reflector back 20 degrees and diffusers tipped forward. TTL

Bride and father outdoors at home: The DFD Pro was used at a medium setting, reflector vertical and diffusers forward, to match the skin tones to the specularity of the background. TTL

Bride close-up outdoors: For a slightly more specular effect, the reflector was tipped forward about 10 degrees to get a 'paparazzi' look. TTL

"No matter what many people say, anyone's modifier only puts the light about four inches above the lens and off to the side in the vertical position. If your subject is close to a wall, side shadows are inevitable. This bugged me. I set out to design a bracket from scratch that would be affordable and solve the most common bracket problems at the same time"

Bride and father, church aisle: Reflector was forward 45 degrees. A shutter speed of 125th was selected to avoid blur in a fairly bright church. TTL

Bridal party, church altar: A quickie group shot was done with the reflector forward 45 degrees. You can tell I was in a hurry. The bridesmaid on the left is holding her bouquet much too high. TTL

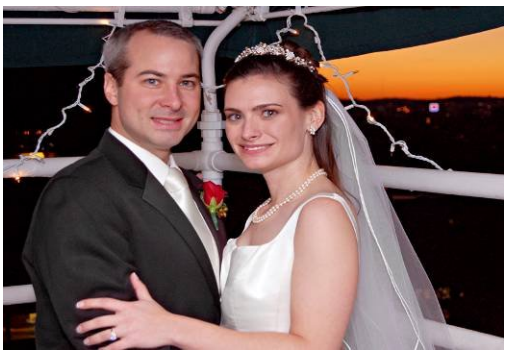
Re-created ceremony ring shot: I never assume that a ceiling is too high for bounce-lighting a close-up. I tipped the reflector 20 degrees back and the diffusers forward for minimal fill, to get a directional main light from the top. Any more front lighting would have killed the shot. TTL

Bride and groom outside full length: A location with plenty of sky light behind me was chosen so I would need the minimum amount of fill from the flash. The flash was set on manual ½ power with the reflector forward 45 degrees. For close-ups, I tipped the reflector back until it did not look flashed-out.

Outdoor twilight group: My ambient light reading was about f 2.8 at 1/8 of a second, so my DFD pro was pushed to the max.

(See prev. image) Dip pose outdoors: The reflector was used in a vertical position with the diffuser forward to get soft enough lighting to match the sunset light.

Candid indoors: The reflector was tipped all the way back and diffusers were used in the forward position to get very directional lighting from the ceiling bounce, with the minimum of front fill and no shadow on the wall behind the people.



Sundown shot: The reflector was back about 20 degrees and the diffusers all the way forward to get a natural looking lighting. The final version was made redder, so the faces and sky would not look too different from each other.

Close-up dance: The reflector is 20 degrees back towards me, with the diffusers forward, for soft facial tones. A second direct flash is fired off a 13 foot stand to give a hard kicker rim light.

Baby and brother: An example of the ultimate objective from flash lighting. Extreme direction off the ceiling, with minimum fill from the DFD Pro, is created by aiming the flash off to the right. The reflector is 30 degrees back toward me and the diffusers are tipped all the way forward. This renders an inter-play of light and shadow across the face to create broad, or Rembrandt, lighting.

DFD Pro on a standard flash

DFD Pro on the bracket

CULTURE CAULDRON: Russia in Conversation

Yuri Pautov was born in 1956 in Murmansk. He lives in Voronezh with his wife Galina and daughter Ann. Yuri graduated from the Applied Mathematics faculty of Voronezh University. He works as a head of a computer department in a firm. Photography is his hobby. In photography he prefers portraits. In portraits he prefers women's portraits. His photo gallery can be found at http://yuri.pautov.ru

Andrew Livov was born and brought up in Voronezh and is Yuri's class-mate and friend. After graduating from the University he was called to the military service. He travels often on business trips, from North to South, from the Eastern border of Russia to the Western ones. He visited Georgia, Armenia, Moldavia, Ukraine, Litvania and others. From 1985 till 1987 he took part in military actions in Afghanistan. After retiring, he came back to his native town, Voronezh. Now he lives in the suburbs of Voronezh, in the Borovoe village with his wife Elena and daughters and works as a teacher of English in a local school.

Yuri Pautov: Andrew, my friend, you must agree with me, that it is not an easy task - to introduce our Russia in the PBase Magazine!

Andrew Livov: Yes. On the one hand, PBase magazine article's format allow us to present a lot of information to our readers, on the other hand – it is too small, because we want to say so much. Besides, it's a great honor and responsibility.

Y: Well, let's just 'zoom in' so to speak. Russia. Moscow – the capital. Voronezh – city where I live and Borovoye – village where you live and work?

A: That's a good idea!

RUSSIA

A: With an area of 17,075,400 sq km, our Russia is by far the largest country in the world! It covers almost twice the total area of the next-largest country, Canada. The Russian Federation stretches across much of the north of the supercontinent of Eurasia. The two most widely separated points in Russia are about 8,000 km (5,000 mi) apart. Our country spans eleven time zones!

Y: Yes and often we celebrate New Year's Eve several times! I, for example, have relatives and friends in Siberia and we have three hours of difference in time.

A: Because of its size, Russia displays both monotony and diversity. As with its topography, its climate, vegetation, and soil spans vast distances. From north to south the East European Plain is clad sequentially in tundra, coniferous forest (taiga), mixed forest, broadleaf forest, grassland (steppe), and semidesert (fringing the Caspian Sea) as the changes in vegetation reflect the changes in climate. Siberia supports a similar sequence but lacks the mixed forest. Most of Siberia is taiga.

Russia has the world's largest forest reserves. It is often called "the lungs of Europe", second only to the Amazon in the amount of carbon dioxide it absorbs. It provides a huge amount of oxygen for not just Europe, but the world.

Y: We must take care of what we have! There are still many untouched places with amazing landscapes, forests and crystal waters.

A: Yes, Russia is a water-rich country. Russia has thousands of rivers and inland bodies of water, providing it with one of the world's largest surface-water resources. The most prominent of Russia's bodies of fresh water is Lake Baikal, the world's deepest and most capacious freshwater lake. Lake Baikal alone contains over one fifth of the world's liquid fresh surface water. Truly unique on Earth, Baikal is home to more than 1,700 species of plants and animals, two thirds of which can be found nowhere else in the world. Many rivers flow across Russia. Of its 100,000 rivers, Russia contains some of the world's longest. The Volga is the most famous—not only because it is the longest river in Europe but also because of its major role in Russian history. There is also the Yenisei river in Siberia.

Yenisei river in Krasnoyarsk

Y: When I was in Siberia, I fell in love with its landscapes - open spaces, hills, mountains!

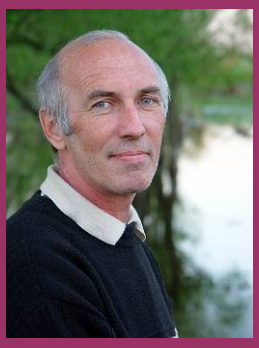
But some man-made things were also striking: Sajano-Shushenskaya hydroelectric power station – a full 102 meters! They say it was made for aluminium production.

Sajano-Shushenskaya hydroelectric power station

A: Yes. Russia has a wide natural resource base including major deposits of petroleum, natural gas, coal, timber and many strategic minerals.

THE DUO:

Yuri Pautov



Andrew Livov

Taiga – Siberian Pines

White marble vein (Moscow Cathedral of Christ the Savior is made of this marble)

"Sale! Eat as much as you can" street sign in Moscow

Y: You know, when I was in Egypt, locals wouldn't believe me when I told them that we have nights in summer that lasts only 4-5 hours. That there are 'White nights' in St Petersburg. And even polar days and nights at my Murmansk, when the sun doesn't sit or never rises for several days.

A: Must be a miracle to them!

Y: Indeed! And now to our capital - Moscow?

MOSCOW

A: Moscow is the capital of our country. It is also the country's economic, financial, educational, and transportation center. Moscow is the most populous city in Europe, with the population constituting about 7% of the total Russian population.

Y: Definitely, those who are going to visit Moscow, know about its Red Square.

A: Yes. Lenin Mausoleum, Historical Museum, Saint Basil's Cathedral are all there.

Lenin's Mausoleum, in Red Square Moscow

It is the site of the Kremlin, which now serves as the ceremonial residence of the President of Russia. Moscow also remains a major economic center and is home to a large number of billionaires.

It was recently named the most expensive city in the world for the second consecutive year. It is home to many scientific and educational institutions, as well as numerous sport facilities. It possesses a complex transport system that includes the world's busiest Metro system, which is famous for its architecture.

Y: Yes, Moscow's architecture is very unique, is it not?

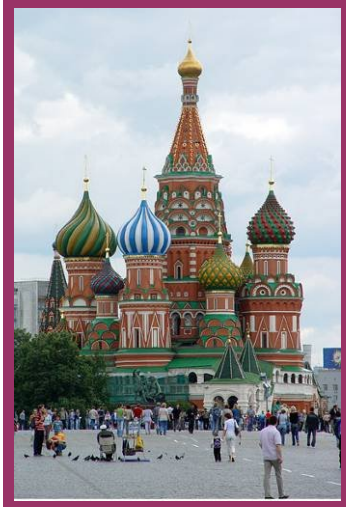
A: Moscow's architecture and performing arts culture are world-renowned. For a long time the city was dominated by numerous Orthodox churches. The look of the city changed drastically during Soviet times. Various works of religious architecture, such as the Kazan Cathedral and the Cathedral of Chist the Saviour, were all destroyed during Stalin's rule. During the 1990s, however, both were rebuilt.

Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Moscow

Y: Andrew, our foreign readers should also know that the word 'ballet' is synonymous with Russia.

A: Yes, Moscow is also the heart of Russian performing arts, including ballet and film. There are ninety-three theatres, one-hundred & thirty-two cinemas and twenty-four concert-halls in Moscow.

Y: Oh! Truly a big city! What about Voronezh, our city? It is only 500 km from Moscow!



Saint Basil's Cathedral, Red Square Moscow

VORONEZH

Lenin's square, center of Voronezh city

A: Only one night in a train. Voronezh is a large city in southwestern Russia, not far from Ukraine. It is located on the Voronezh River, twelve kilometers away from the spot where the Voronezh River empties into the Don.

Y: How about some history, Andrew?

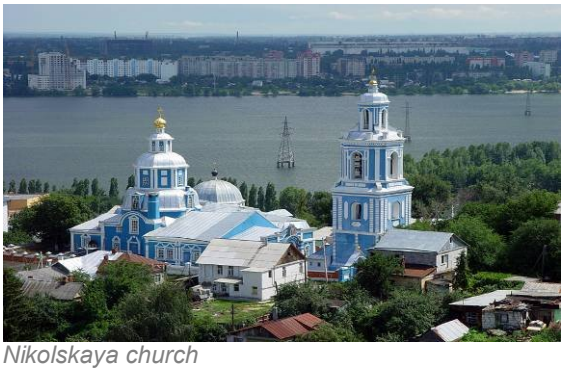
A: The Voronezh River was first mentioned in Hypatian Codex of 1177; the town was founded in 1585 by Tsar Feodor I as a fort protecting the Russian state from the raids of Crimean and Nogay Tatars. However, settlements had been present here since the Stone Ages.

In the 17th century, Voronezh became a considerable commercial and handicrafts center. In 1695–1696 Tsar Peter The Great built a dockyard in Voronezh, where the Azov fleet was under construction for the Azov campaign (probably the first fleet ever built in Russia). During his reign Voronezh became the largest city in southern Russia and the administrative center of the large southern region. In the 18th–19th centuries Voronezh was a centre of the chernozem (black earth - the black-colored soil that contains a very high percentage of humus) agricultural region. Manufacturing industry (mills, tallow-melting, butter-making, soap, leather and other works) as well as bread, cattle, suet, and the hair trade developed in the town. In the 19th century a railway connected Voronezh with Rostov-on-Don (1868) and Moscow (1871).

Stony bridge' 1826. Center of the city

Y: Very informative! And what is the Voronezh of today?

A: Today Voronezh is the economic, industrial, cultural and scientific center of the so-called Black Earth Region. In the city there are 7 theaters, 12 cinemas, 19 high schools; it is also home to the Voronezh state University. The city's large student population includes many foreigners as foreign students in Russia usually study one year of Russian language in Voronezh before moving on to universities elsewhere.



Nikolskaya church

Y: Great! I think that we can now tell our readers about some famous people.

A: Many famous people were born in Voronezh and not far from it. Among them poets and writers Platonov, Bunin, Koltsov, Nikitin, Marshak, Troepolskii. Incidentally, the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin appreciated Koltsov's lyrics a lot.

We can also mention painters - Kramskoi, Ge, the physicist Cherenkov. The Russian poet Osip Mandelstam was exiled to Voronezh after his arrest in 1934 and wrote a series of poems there collected under the title "Voronezh Notebooks". Two of the Russian cosmonauts, Feoktistov and Fillipchenko, were born and brought up in Voronezh too.

Y: And as for sportsmen, I think that our Olympic champion Dmitry Sautin is well known. We love the city we live in!

A: And how can we not say anything about the most beautiful girls in the world, living here? There is a legend, that when Peter the Great, a famous Russian tsar, decided to build the Russian fleet, he chose Voronezh for that purpose. He ordered to bring the most beautiful girls from all Russia to Voronezh to attract workers and skillful men for building the fleet. May be it is true, may be not, but the fact is: the most beautiful Russian girls live in Voronezh.

Y: And I must say that this fact was the cause of my portrait's passion. When I decided to buy myself a digital camera, I enrolled in the Sony Talk forum on dpreview.com. There was a legendary Yehuda Katz from Israel, who posted women's portraits there. And all theforum members would say: "What a beauty!" I made my first post, saying that the most beautiful girls live in my country of Russia, in my city of Voronezh. Naturally, they said: 'Prove it!' I had to do it, you know?

A: Yes. And now I understand the term 'Yuri's eyes' at that forum.

Bunin monument

Pushkin Monument

Nunnery

Y: Indeed. Infact, after a while, I decided to start counting how many portraits I had taken and posted. At last count, the number was more than 440 !

A: I think that your women's portraits are the main reason why people from all over the world visit your photo gallery.

Y: And what about the beauty of our Nature? You live in such a beautiful place. How did you manage to live in Borovoye?

BOROVOYE

Andrew's family

A: When I was called to the military service, our state, the USSR, promised to give me an apartment after retiring. I was an obedient officer; I always fulfilled all the orders and commands. For two years I took part in military actions in Afghanistan. But after retiring I got no apartment. So I found myself and my family on the street, without job, without a place, without money to buy or to rent anything. It was not my fault. I always gave all my health and skills to defend the Motherland. But our state deceived me.

Y: It was a period, when USSR came to its end, and so much has changed in our lives.

A: When I retired from military service, our family decided to return to our native town Voronezh. We came here, but we had no place or even enough money to buy a residence or to rent it. Our friends and relatives helped us with money, and I began to look for a place. But apartments in our town were very expensive, and we couldn't buy any. In winter, after a half a year of searching the cousin of my wife invited us to visit him in Borovoe, a village in the suburbs of Voronezh. We came to this place and liked it at a glance. It was sunny winter day, the air was fresh and clear and there was silence everywhere. After that I began to look for a house in Borovoe. At last I found it. It was almost in ruins, but we were able to buy it. I am not a builder, but wanted very much to have a house where my family (my wife and two daughters) could live. So, I began to work. Of course, our relatives and friends helped us.

Now we live in a four-roomed house with gas, electricity, cold and hot running water. We also have a small kitchen-garden, where we grow different kinds of vegetables, fruit trees and flowers.

Y: Thank you, Andrew. Finally, how about talking about cultural traditions in our country? I think that it will be interesting to the PBase magazine readers to hear about traditions in the life of your Borovoye village.

church in Borovoye

A: Each country has its own traditions. But there are some traditions which are familiar for many countries. Some of them are of religions nature. For example, celebrating Christmas or Easter. But Russia is a unique country. We are orthodox and we celebrate orthodox holidays, but we also celebrate pagans holidays as well. For example "The eve of Ivana Kupala". In the evening all the people of our village make a campfire. They dance around it, then jump over it. Girls put flowers in the river.

After the Great October Socialist revolution many churches were destroyed and many clergymen were arrested and even killed. But nowadays religion in Russia has a second birth and plays a great role in the cultural live, uniting the society.

The first mentioning of Borovoe church can be found in old books in 1646. It was made of wood. Then it burned down and in its place, a stone church was built. It is said that during its building in 1790 parishioners added fresh eggs to strengthen the cemeting and make it stronger. Borovoe church was the only one that was not destroyed during the Second World War.

Borovoe church is the only church in the locality. People from nearby villages come here. Such events as celebrations of religious holidays, weddings an so on are held there. Two years ago a church-parochial school was built near the church. More than 100 children attend it. Some of the boys help the bell-ringer in his service.

Y: I think I hear these bells ringing. We, here in Russia, call this: 'Malinovii zvon' - mellow chine.

A: Well, Yuri, I hope we have managed to make this article informative and interesting for the readers! I know I had a great time reliving memories!

Y: Yes, Andrew – I hope so too. Finally, thanks to PBase Magazine & Arjun for this opportunity to talk about our Russia, which we so love!

church in Borovoye

beauty of Borovoye #1

beauty of Borovoye #2

Please send comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

LEARNING:Nature Streaming Through the Lens

Of Eagle Eyes and Tide-Pool Secrets: Nature Streaming Through the Lens

By Norman Rich

This article explores creativity and visual choices using photography as an artist's medium. My main areas of photographic inspirations are of wildlife and landscape, in natural settings largely from the Pacific North West Coast to the Canadian Rocky Mountains. My approach has evolved from being a visual fine artist for the last forty years. Canvas painting, printmaking, sculpture and fiber art have cross-pollinated my approach to photography.

Nurturing my creative process has provided me a path to proceed from one decade to the next. Internal worlds of creativity have corresponded to outer worlds of adventure, such as travel overland from Asia to Europe, a solo motorcycle journey from Western Canada to Guatemala, and exploring wild stretches of the coast of British Columbia in an old steel sailboat.

I enjoy sharing visual and artistic issues and have included in italics excerpts from a book I wrote in 1995, entitled *"Musings of an Artist".* They are often in question form and allow for multiple responses rather than a single correct answer. Musings allow me to dwell for a time on intangibles and possibilities, which in many ways is how I approach photography: *"looking at a photo. Do we see a mirror, a shadow, a window? What else other than likes, wants and needs are we seeing?"*

Our daily lives routinely require us to scan and process information quickly, with causal certainties. By contrast, the creative process has allowed me opportunities to explore, linger, dwell and savor experiences fostering notions that are more relative than absolute. I see myself as navigating within a broad range of variables, taking risks while having a certain detachment from the outcome, and finding satisfaction in the journey itself. *"In a mix of organic intuitions and planned purpose, and in blends of rhythmically formed and thoughtfully constructed photos, how aware are we of our creative means?"*

When seeking to elevate one's photography, one can choose to elevate the photographic process. My view is that consistent and memorable images come not from trying to affect the look, or appearance of a photo but instead by remaining true to and in touch with the intent of the photo throughout the photographic chain. When the issues of photographic intent are left to chance, there are risks that chance more than choices will determine the results. I have found that, where I allow the making of a photo to follow its unique course driven by intent, my intuitions flourish and guide the process, propelling me into new experiences.

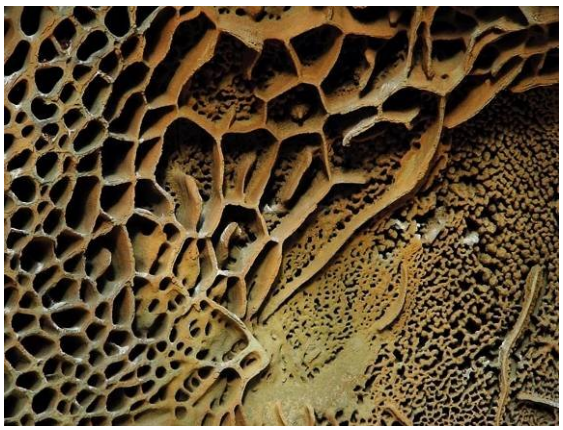
It may be insightful to illuminate or shine light on one's photography as a whole, and on each individual photo. Over decades, examining creative intent in my art has become increasingly rewarding. As my photographic intent deepens, widening sensibilities along with expanded means of proceeding emerge. At some level, I inquire of myself what I wish to bring about, or bring into being with the photo. In essence it is intent that distinguishes one artist's work from another, and it is evolving intent that replenishes and propels an artist's contributions over a lifetime. *"As artists go out on a limb, branching paths send signs in mulching leaves, to get the messages back to the roots."*

When I respond to other photographers' work, I'm drawn to share how I am seeing, not to make judgments but rather to put emphasis on art appreciation, or the dialogue between the artist's intent and the viewer's experience. This approach also encourages more freedom without competition, in my own work as well as the photographs of others. I prefer to think in terms of "more or less realized" rather than the hierarchal notion of "best", in regards to art and photos.

ABOUT NORMAN:

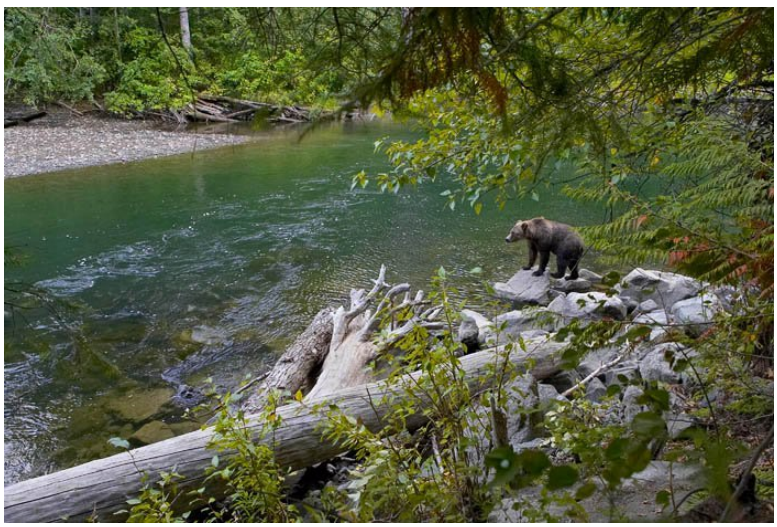
Norman Rich is a visual artist with studio residence in Vancouver B.C. His work in photography reflects the inspiration he finds in nature: worlds of flow and forming, growth and rhythmic change. In bookmarking his site you'll discover new photos on an ongoing basis

I find that the act of valuing subtle changing qualities of light leads towards images of increased power, and a capacity to create photos of greater significance. There is a frequent tendency to put attention on subjects at the expense of light and color, which I personally view as primary. Seeing specific qualities of light and color, and evaluating complex color interactions in relation to expressive intent can be made to matter.



In choosing an artist's path, I find it vital to become comfortable with a creative process of complex realities and sustained ambiguities. The way qualities of light are portrayed invites a broad array of sensitivities. Vast options may thus open to us, in the making of each photo. We can choose to respond from habits and the securities of knowing, capturing what we know or think to be true, or branch out taking the risks of embedding new discoveries in the photo, where the results may be filled with surprise and wonder. *"If the artist conveys only the depth known to the artist, how will the art find its way out*?"

In natural world images, I make an effort not only to represent the forms but also the energy, the ceaseless change and growing aspects of nature. This leads me to emphasize moments that I think of as timeless and cyclic, that represent essences of things. The further I travel on this journey, the more I am of the view that it is my prime role to share the hidden mysteries. "*As an artist are you attentive to the scent of flowers, and the joy that nurtures you? Do you perform the remarkable dance of the bee that lets others know where the meadows are?*" In a way it is less a striving for self-expression than an urge to enter a larger self, to see and experience the other, be it the bear, eagle, or the salmon in their wild surroundings. http://www.pbase.com/norman/eagles_and_salmon



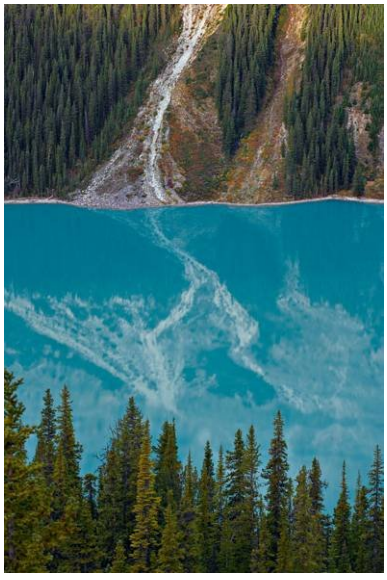
Living on the coast, I have been inspired by marine realms of seastars, lichen, seaweeds and chitons. When I look in that microcosm, the universe opens up a myriad of wonders: "*Stay, be patient, look long enough and the galaxy and all its splendor will emerge from this little tide-pool.*" The Intertidal Connections gallery reflects this coastal world of flow and forming, growth and rhythmic change: http://www.pbase.com/norman/intertidal_connections In making paintings, sculpture and photographs over a number of decades, I have found fascinating parallels between the creative process and the life emerging from the ebb and flow of coastal tide-pools.

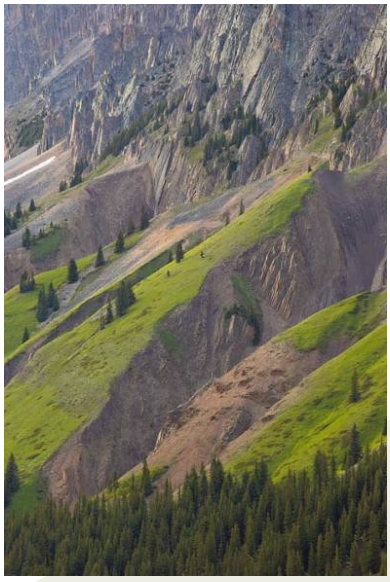
"I find that the act of valuing subtle changing qualities of light leads towards images of increased power, and a capacity to create photos of greater significance. There is a frequent tendency to put attention on subjects at the expense of light and color, which I personally view as primary. Seeing specific qualities of light and color, and evaluating complex color interactions in relation to expressive intent can be made to matter"

I see patterns and tensions between order and chaos in nature. In doing so, I nurture variations of intent and perspectives from one shot to the next, both when staying in place or moving while photographing from a variety of vantages in the landscape. "*Walking on smooth concrete slabs I walk as if I know where I am going. On rough natural ground I find myself exploring by looking where I am going*." In landscape I use L-brackets mounted to the camera bodies in order to fluidly move from horizontal to vertical framing. I carefully compose in-camera so as to avoid cropping, as my end output is commonly 13"x19" fine arts prints. A landscape series often begins with a contextual shot, which is usually more generalized, and composed at a wider angle. From this initial broad overview, I proceed towards more specific relationships, selecting compositions within compositions, making connections with what I see and feel.

Figure-ground relationships within the rectangle of a photo are important to me. The terms subject and background are often used separately as descriptions of vanishing point perspective from the "real" world, whereas the term figure-ground relationship is an artistic reference that corresponds to the skeletal structure of an image. When I bring attention to figure-ground relationships I am making the placement, proportions, scale and weighting of the elements in the photo matter. When making photos of eagles in their environment, this means a combination of portraying the eagles and the rich surrounding rainforest with its energy fields of light and color. Examples of this can be found in the gallery linked here: http://www.pbase.com/norman/valley_of_eagles

In my opinion, the weighting of the visual elements in a landscape, and where the camera is placed, is much too complex and interesting a process to leave entirely to schematics such as the rule of thirds. I take great care in where the camera is positioned; small changes when carefully considered can make major differences. Just as centering subjects tends to create static relationships, so will off-centering compositions increase dynamic movement. Some of these choices of camera positions may be found in the photography of the plains, foothills and mountains of Western Canada as shown here: http://www.pbase.com/norman/canada_west





"In choosing an artist's path, I find it vital to become comfortable with a creative process of complex realities and sustained ambiguities. The way qualities of light are portrayed invites a broad array of sensitivities. Vast options may thus open to us, in the making of each photo. We can choose to respond from habits and the securities of knowing, capturing what we know or think to be true, or branch out taking the risks of embedding new discoveries in the photo, where the results may be filled with surprise and wonder. 'If the artist conveys only the depth known to the artist, how will the art find its way out?'"

I look for subjects, events and relationships in the natural world that allow me to feature interplays of opposite tendencies. For me, the term “interplay” refers to a mix of elements in the photo, and how they resonate with each other. The term “opposites” suggests photographic tensions, and the chosen means through which these tensions are visually resolved. Examples of this include above and below, emerging and submerged, geometry and the organic. “*Swimming our lives in relational energy fields. The more I play with opposites the more I find them complementary.”*

The dynamic way opposites tendencies play out lends to asymmetrical ways of making balance. Is the interplay based primarily on clear rhythmic patterns, or seemingly less predictable random arrangements? Does inherent complexity and fluidity remain as a photographer proceeds to reduce elements of nature to abstractions or designs? Can additional meanings be found by revealing more of the structure beneath the flow of things? *“You come to the outer edge of nature requesting permission to enter. Barely audible can you hear the whisper of nature asking: Where does your self end?”*

The personal flexibility offered by computer post-processing has attracted me with enthusiasm to digital photography as an expressive artist’s medium. I consider an image straight from the camera to be a translation or approximation of what I intended, no matter what model, lens or sensor combination is used. I enjoy the time spent with photos in fine-tuning refinements.

I prefer to work from raw with a converted image, initially of lower contrast and saturation, and to make adjustments selectively both within the image and globally. I am interested, in a painterly sense, to proceed through a push-pull process involving the visual elements on their own and in relationship to each other. Push-pull techniques such as dodging and burning help me to modulate and fine-tune, according to personal preferences and chosen intent.

I find that attitudes bear a direct relationship on the photographic process and results. Some attitudes may pose blocks, while others free up creativity to flow again. Here are some of the guideposts that have allowed me to grow and follow my artist’s call over four decades. *“ Would you prefer to experience a wider set of beliefs, a narrower set of assumptions or no beliefs and no assumptions at all?”*

Put yourself in optimum positions to attract unexpected opportunities. Anticipate the light and subject changing, and interpret the structure of the photo through tonalities, light and color. Frame your subjects accordingly. Move closer, getting inside the shot. Be able to freely respond with vertical as well as horizontal compositions, according to expressive considerations. Reassess visual translations from one shot to the next, deepening the process through exploratory variations.

Dial in your point or area of sharp focus in combination with your chosen depth of field. Carefully weigh and acknowledge the implications of handheld versus shooting from a stable platform, especially in regards to low light, and expanding depth of field options. Optimizing the tripod/ball-head combination affords me expanded latitude of depth of field, with the advantages of using lower ISO for the tack sharp consistency required for large prints.

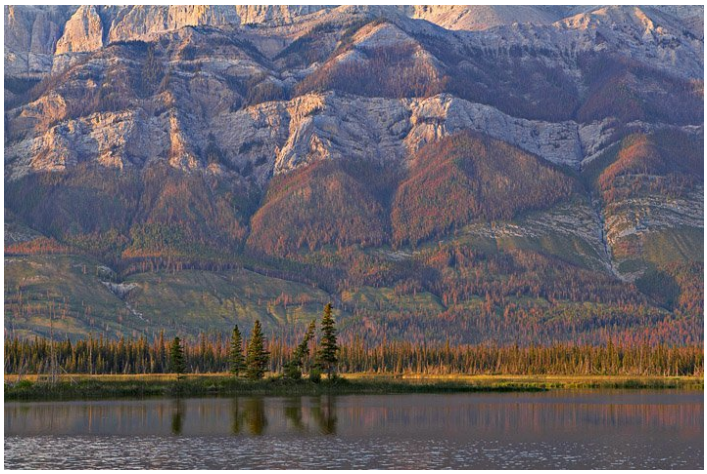
Create in an active sense. Make connections and reveal the discoveries you have made in your photographs. I think of photography both as a craft beginning with the instructions given to the camera, and as an art form based on the capacity of visual choices to make significant and memorable images. Let intuitions guide your intent: be fearlessly creative. *“Blank canvas on the easel: you ask the muse can it drive. Yes, but are you going to let go of the wheel?”*

Consider the differences that would occur, were you to give qualities of light individual attention from one shot to the next. If the sequence of perceptions changes, how will the shot be affected? Be aware of prioritizing purpose, as shooting conditions change. Give the moment your full attention; commit to the shot and all it requires, while remaining relaxed. In wild and natural settings, anticipate peak moments; be quick and decisive.

“I find that attitudes bear a direct relationship on the photographic process and results. Some attitudes may pose blocks, while others free up creativity to flow again. Here are some of the guideposts that have allowed me to grow and follow my artist’s call over four decades. Would you prefer to experience a wider set of beliefs, a narrower set of assumptions or no beliefs and no assumptions at all””

In the presence of nature, act as one who belongs. Staring and other body tensions are telegraphed to wildlife, and excitement tends to transfer movement to the camera, especially with long telephoto lenses. Calming yourself and breathing deeply with a normal heartbeat will help convey to wild animals a sense of trust, and that you are not a predator. Seeing beyond animal shapes to discover and portray the spirit and differences between individuals holds unending challenges and rewards. Examples of this orientation are found in the gallery linked here: http://www.pbase.com/norman/canada_west_wildlife

Once in the foothills of Kamloops B.C., I came upon an open clearing with a small community of ravens perched in surrounding cottonwood trees. Sensing that it was a spring training rookery for their young, I stepped forward and spoke quietly, hoping to participate with my camera gear. Following much raven crosstalk around the circle, I sensed that my presence was accepted, and I began to photograph their interactions and behavior, over the course of a magical afternoon. At one point, after an intense round of playful learning activity, the young ones collectively closed their eyes and had a nap. I felt privileged to be included in their world. Photos from this raven series are found here.



I find that the notion of play offers me a spirited freedom and latitude of options to discover new avenues. I am also open to surprise myself, and go against or reverse the grain of intent. I find it satisfying to balance between rigorous approaches and playful ones. Serendipity and purpose are a welcome blend in my photographic adventures. In photography, learning "how to" can take us only so far. Beyond this, creative realms exist that exercise our intuitions, and offer infinite paths of unexpected discoveries. "*The entire universe is found within you. If the artist conveys only the depth known to the artist, how will the art find its way out?*"

I am drawn to nurture my creative self, and find that my experiences in nature support me in this quest. I affirm my path at a pace that blends satisfaction with risks and the desire to proceed. I am committed to a process that lets the results emerge and grow naturally over time. *"Inside of you, works of art arise from spirit in solitude. Outside of you notions of art flitter in worlds crowded by opinions. Live the life that lives within."*

"I am drawn to nurture my creative self, and find that my experiences in nature support me in this quest. I affirm my path at a pace that blends satisfaction with risks and the desire to proceed. I am committed to a process that lets the results emerge and grow naturally over time. Inside of you, works of art arise from spirit in solitude. Outside of you notions of art flitter in worlds crowded by opinions. Live the life that lives within."

TRAVEL: Namibia

Born in The Dominican Republic, Cesar Fernandez moved to the United States in 1987 to complete his medical training in Gastroenterology and Hepatology. Passionate and dedicated to his medical career for most of the year, it is a life-long love affair with nature that back in 2002 found him navigating the swollen waters of the Amazon river, an adventure which turned out to be only the first of many other journeys around the world he would accomplish in the following three years. As he marveled in the presence of these many natural wonders of the world, quickly, a disturbing reality became clear to Cesar. These magnificent nature's works of art were getting rapidly damaged and destroyed. In the end, the root of the problem was "us": uncontrolled overpopulation, irresponsible land management, political instability, and plain human greed. He is committed to use photography as a tool to bring nature to the common people, to educate people in the fight for protection and conservation of our natural resources. Cesar is currently working on a book project and two international photo exhibitions for 2008.

TALES FROM NAMIBIA:

"If anything, my arrival to Windhoek, capital of Namibia, is remembered as initially developing a sense of confusion and possibly even disappointment"

A Namibia Adventure

If anything, my arrival to Windhoek, capital of Namibia, is remembered as initially developing a sense of confusion and possibly even disappointment. Windhoek is an old WWII German styled homes city with pristine clean roads and one of the best infrastructures and communication systems in all of Africa. Certainly, this was not the image of the wild and primordial Africa I envisioned and came to photograph.

But my confusion was short lived after my journey began early the very next day. Only after a few hours drive away from the city you will be taken back thousands, if not millions of years back into the past to a land that could very well have looked then exactly as you are seeing it now.
Namibia is a large country and the least densely populated in the world (2.5 persons per km²). In spite of all this, Namibia has a well maintained and organized system of roads which makes transportation very easy and comfortable.

As I left the city I began to understand what makes Namibia such an unique and special place for photographers: the Namib desert, geographically, one of the oldest places on earth, with its multitude of alien-like strange vegetation, gravity defying rock formations and the few, elusive animals that live in one of the hottest and driest places on the planet.

Add to this, billions of color gammas, especially reds and yellows impossible to reproduce, and you spend the rest of your life photographing without repeating the same composition. It is the "ultimate destination" for any landscape photographer.

The first day of my journey began with an early morning six hour drive toward the south, arriving at the Sossusvlei region right on time for a short sunset photo shoot. Home of the tallest sand dunes in the world, Sossusvlei is characterized by giant red sand dunes shaped by elegant undulated crests created by the effect of the wind. Their striking red-rusty color is given by their high content of ferrous and other minerals in the sand. These are non-shifting dunes. In order to be able to photograph the early light at sunrise, I chose to stay at the near Sesriem Campsite, which consisted of small tents offering otherwise basic accommodations with shared bathrooms. There is a 15 to 20 minute drive from the camp to the parking site at the dunes, and a 5 minute delay for registration going through the gates of the park.
Without a doubt, the most popular point in this region is the well known DeadVley, geologically, a clay pan in the flood plain of the Tsauchah River, which flows on the average only once in a decade. Towering above the clay pan are sand dunes that reach 350 meters in elevation above the river bed. They are veritable mountains of

Deadvlei Panorama

"Add to this, billions of color gammas, especially reds and yellows impossible to reproduce, and you spend the rest of your life photographing without repeating the same composition. It is the ultimate destination for any landscape photographer"

sand and the tallest dunes in the world. In the center of this expanse of dry white clay only the skeletons of ancient camel-thorn trees are left, some of which are over 500 years old. These tell of a time when plentiful water allowed them to grow to full height, but as the climate changed and the water disappeared they died.

My previously planned two days stay at Sossusvlei proved to be not enough time for what I witnessed. For the serious landscape photographer, the vastness and overwhelming beauty and uniqueness of the place would likely require "at least" 4 to 5 days to photograph. Aerial photography would offer another great point of view that only few take advantage of. Ultralight flights and hot air balloons are offered almost daily. If I only knew!
A couple of aerial views taken from the cloudy and scratched acrylic window of a single engine Cessna were the only images I had the opportunity to capture.

Aerial View of the great red sand dunes of the Sossusvlei region

My next stop was the city of Swakopmund in the Atlantic coast. In order to cover as much ground as possible, I had arranged to fly east over the Namib, turning north along the Atlantic coast all the way to our final destination. From the air one gets a sense of the extent of the desert and its infinite dunes. In spite of the lifeless and desolated landscape, the desert has numerous species of plants, insects, reptiles and even mammals that have adapted to survive in these conditions.
Flying north along the Atlantic coast I also witnessed the mythical Skeleton Coast and the several ghostly remains of old ships claimed by the strong ocean currents and treacherous topography of the ocean floor.

With a WWII-style German architecture, Swakopmund is the most popular vacation spot for most Namibians of German descent. After three freezing nights and only one tepid shower at the Sesriem Campsite, an overnight stay at the Hansa Hotel was certainly a nice treat.
The next day, I had planned to meet with a local herpetologist to arranged an outdoor photo session. He brought several species of reptiles to a previously selected point in the desert on the outskirt of the city including a Palmato Gecko, a Camaleon Namaqua, and a Horned Adder snake among many others. Some of these reptiles are very rare and elusive, and would be very difficult to photograph in the wild.

Horned adder snake

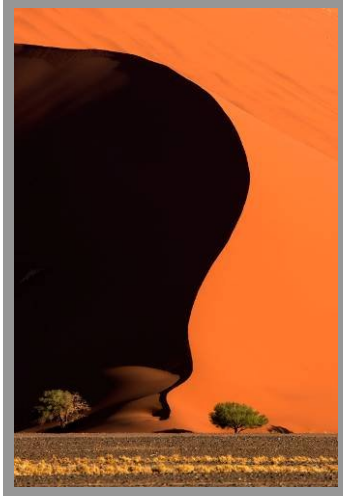
Early morning on Sept 3rd, I drove north toward Cape Cross, site of one of the largest seal colonies in the region. Here I got the opportunity to document the interaction between seal mothers and pups, as well as the constant struggle of orphan pups for survival. I also witnessed a unique species of Jackal which have evolved around these seal colonies, almost exclusively feeding from seal meat and other remains.

After my last two short overnight stops, my route plan was mainly focused toward what was originally one of the main reasons for this trip: Etosha National Park, also known as "The Jewel of Africa".
To get there, a two day drive through the Damaraland region took me millions of years back in time. One of the most scenic areas in Namibia, Damaraland offers prehistoric water courses, Petrified Forest, open grasslands and giant granite koppies. Geologists have found here some of the oldest formations and rocks ever documented. A drive through the Damaraland region has many interesting highlights. During my visit to this region I had the opportunity to photograph the legendary Welwitschia mirabilis, an endemic plant of the Namib desert, and the second oldest living organism known to man. Some plants can live more than 1800 years.

Another fascinating site I was able to photograph was the Twyfelfontein, a wonderful rocky outcrop with thousands of Bushman engravings.

After a long and frequently interrupted drive for photo opportunities my day ended in what I still regard as my all-time favorite hotel ever: The Mowani mountain camp - meaning "Place of God". The camp is nestled between giant ancient boulders at a high elevation, rendering a panoramic view of its surroundings, strange and unique enough as to challenge the view of any other alien planet's landscape.
I have to admit that as eager as I was to get to Etosha National Park, I regretted leaving this area the next day.

Finally, on September 5, I arrived at the entrance of Etosha, greeted by a large herd of of Burchell's zebras and Springboks taking turns around a water hole.



Dune 45 - This picture was given a "Highly Honored" award at the 2006 Nature's Best Magazine photography competition and has been exhibited at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington from October 2006 to October 2007

Ripples in Red Dune - Ever changing ripples in the surface of the dunes are created by the effect of the wind.

Family of Springboks, a male and four females, walk across a bed of dry grass. Etosha

One of the interesting facts that I learned during that trip is that Etosha National Park, different than most other well known parks in Africa like The Serengeti and Masai Mara, is a completely wire fenced park and, during the dry season, the park staff even manage and control the supply of water to the different water holes throughout the park, many of which were artificially built in strategic locations around the park.

Fencing the park has prevented wild animals from invading the farm and cattle lands that by now exist right on the other side of the fence. This measure has confined the animals to a "predictable" environment far different from what they would experience in true wilderness. Again, partly man managed in order to maintain and survive.

Having said that, Etosha, with its dry grasses, red dusty soil and bright yellow flowering acacias offers a very different background for wildlife photography than one is used to seeing in the green grassy plains of east central Africa. As I said earlier, it is the rusty color of the soil, the dry yellow grasses and the abundant wildlife that gives Etosha its nickname: *The Jewel of Africa*.

If any advice I would give to any other "serious amateur" photographers wanting to visit Namibia is that one should read and plan ahead in order to take advantage of the limited time one has available on these trips.
Namibia offers countless magical and unique places impossible to cover in one trip. Try to focus and dedicate plenty of time to your main subject of interest, whether scenic or wildlife. Avoid the temptation to try to cover all at once.
A low crime rate, great road conditions makes Namibia an ideal place for a "self drive" photo safari experience, specially if one has visited it once before.

As I flew back home across the Atlantic Ocean I began planning my next trip back and the many places I wish I had visited and photographed.

On October 31st, 2007 I will be visiting Namibia's neighbor country, Botswana, for a photo expedition of the Okavango delta.
It will be in early May of 2008 when I will be returning back to Namibia, this time as a self drive and more selective photo trip, which will include several aerial photo opportunities.

Palmato Gecko (Eye wiper) buries itself in the sand and feeds on small insects. Perfectly adapted to these conditions!

Cesar Fernandez
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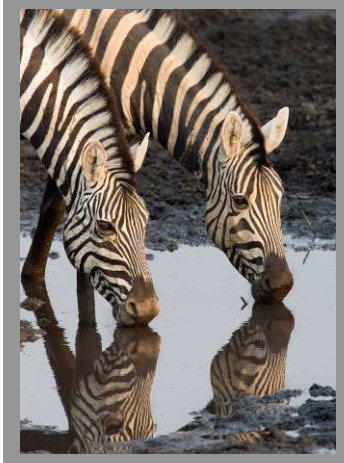

The silhouette of this pair of zebras is perfectly reflected in the muddy, shallow water of this waterhole

I captured this unique pattern of zebra's stripes as a large herd concentrated around a waterhole

Please email your comments and suggestions to magazine@pbase.com

@PBase

Q: What is new at PBase ?

A: New additions to the team – Jon (nooutlet), Conrad (ckirby) & Nigel (nkirby) joined the PBase team as programmers. We hope to see a lot of new stuff soon! Farewell and best of luck to Chris Stone (ctstone).

A: In-built support for StatCounter, Google Analytics and Extreme tracking counters for your galleries. No more painful manual entries to each gallery page !

A: New Feeds for your galleries ! Feeds can be subscribed to for Recent Gallery or PAD uploads, Gallery updates, Photo uploads & Comments

A: In case you missed it, PBase now allows you to store upto 500MB of data for the same price of $23 per year. Yeah, 100 megabytes more than before for an increased cost of $0

A: The PBase team moved to a new office space in September. It's larger, better, and in the same building as the PBase ISP, so it should lead to better testing and regression and more reliability.

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PARTING SHOTS

When last I wrote "Parting Shots," I was sitting in my Washington, D.C. apartment reminiscing about the interview I had just finished at the White House, with President George Bush's photographer. (After the interview was published, PBase Magazine was written up in the Washington Examiner's Yeas and Nays Column – check it out here!) We were also celebrating the first double-digit issue of PBase Magazine, and Arjun (the editor from page one!) and I, after two years of nonstop emailing only, had finally met in the flesh.

Now, as I write "Parting Shots" for this issue, my apartment has turned into a flat and Arjun and I have met again, this time more randomly. Having just moved to London, where I will be spending a year studying at the London School of Economics, I sent an e-mail to everyone updating my contact information. Arjun just so happened to be returning from a whirlwind tour around the world, and was here in London for a day. His hotel, he e-mailed me, was outside of Trafalgar Square. Plans were set to meet for breakfast the next morning.

I woke up early and headed over to his hotel. Found it, called Arjun and informed him I was standing in the dining room where some nice breakfast was being served. I was hungry! Arjun, on the other hand, informed me that he too was standing in the middle of the dinning room where a nice breakfast was being served. What? Yes, he was 45 minutes away in another one of these hotels! The time was 8:00 and I had to be in a meeting at 10:00. So as any devoted co-editor would do, off I ran.

Two trains and 10 long blocks later, I arrived at the hotel where the breakfast intended for me was being served. Talk about a power meeting! Arjun and I quickly spoke about this magazine issue, ways to improve future issues, how the baby was doing (answer: fantastic, but missed dad), work and what I was doing across the pond. Half an hour later I was out the door, but not without a photograph of us together (Arjun confessed that he had been traveling throughout Europe without a camera!). We tried to find a scenic background for the photo, but since we were so far away from everything (no hard feelings, Arjun!), nothing seemed to work. So we took it right in the hotel lobby.

All of that said, we hope that you all enjoyed issue number 11. In putting this issue together, Arjun had to fight against the clock, which seemed to not cooperate with PBase Magazine deadlines. Thanks, Arjun, for your hard work; it was great seeing you! As for the rest of you, please visit with me in London – I would love to meet you! Because on PBase, nobody knows you are a student! Anyway, we can take pictures together, see the sights, and even have breakfast. Just make sure you have the right address.

Cheers!
Eric Kuhn
London, England

Eric and Arjun in the Thistle hotel in London

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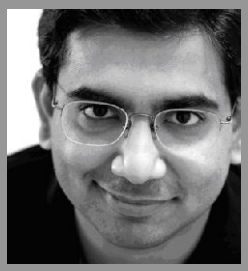

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